Polyhedron®

NEWSZINE

DECEMBER

78

RPGA® NETWORK

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The Third Degree

A Mutant Holiday

From the gaming casebook of Inspector Jeff Cisneros

I was sitting in Mercer's, having a rye-on-the-rocks, when this guy with three arms swaggered up to me. "You Cisneros?" he grumbled. "Yeah, whatta ya want?" I replied, lighting a Lucky with a deft flick of my lighter. The next thing I knew, I was in my office reading my dirty ceiling tiles and feeling strangely like checking out this thing called the GAMMA WORLD® game. What got into my head? Grimly resolving not to drink that rotgut or hang out at that joint again, I feverishly plied my way through the game with some interesting results.

GAMMA WORLD Game, 4th Edition

The first thing I noticed was the cover by Eric Olsen. It has a gritty, future-shock feel to it and sharp detail. The sharpness of the cover carried through the entire book. The interior color art is crisply drawn, highly detailed, and quite realistic; just plain good Science Fantasy art that is appropriate to the setting. Clyde Caldwell, Jeff Easley, Larry Elmore, and Keith Parkinson deserve credit.

As I dug into the text, I was surprised by the comfortable layout. Text boxes shaded light green show optional information and tables; boxes with a solid border show essential information.

A World Reborn

I must admit that I approached the GAMMA WORLD game with misgivings. Three times before, TSR has released this game, and each time it disappointed me. However, I was stunned with this Fourth Edition. This is the best organized and structured TSR product I have ever had the honor of seeing. Bruce Nesmith was given the task of taking a three-time failure and turning it into a winner, a Herculean task. He has outdone himself. For those of you who have never played the earlier edition games—it takes place several hundred years in the future. "The Cataclysm"—a nuclear and biological war—occurred about 2200 A.D. The United States, now called "Meriga," has been rendered unrecognizable by the devastation. Normal humanity has been mutated into several strains, with both beneficial and disadvantageous mutations. Also, plants and animals have achieved intelligence and mobility, as well as mutations. The PCs must work to survive both the devastated environment and inimical intelligent beings. The introduction leaps into the action with an encounter described by one of its participants, one of the mutants of Gamma World. The designers follow with a short, well-structured outline about the game, its setting, its mood, and its terminology.

Character Generation

Character generation becomes an easy and pleasurable "follow the leader" task. All you need to do is follow the chapter from beginning to end. Each step is laid out in order. Remember the little green boxes I discussed earlier? They hold important explanations and tables, and they are used to assure understanding. In too many other games I've been frustrated and confused by page shuffling and chart hunting—but there's no confusion here. Character creation takes less than an hour.

Playing the Game

The following chapters discuss mutations available to characters, game play, the tech levels of Gamma World civilizations, and equipment. These chapters are not dry; they give you a comprehensive idea of the structure of the game. The use of analogies, comparisons, and encounters described by the participants makes this material clear.

Most of the charts and diagrams are clear and comprehensible, although there are a few exceptions. For example, the "Use Artifacts Diagram" describes the path a PC follows while trying to discover the function of unfamiliar equipment. Granted, this is a complex task, but this chart is too complex.

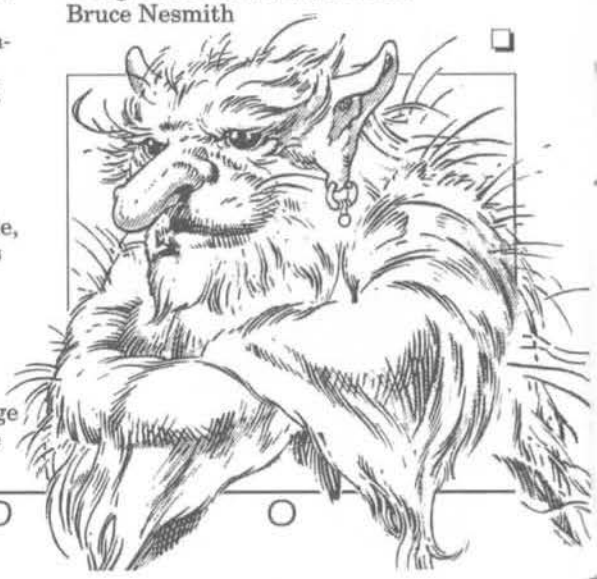
The technology levels of Gamma World civilizations range from stone-age to futuristic technologies, and they are clearly and briefly explained. The chapter on equipment contains pictures and specifications of a variety of useful items explained in game terms; the numerous illustrations make this a pleasure to read.

Creatures, Alliances, and Robots

The next three chapters explain the adversaries, allies, and entities that dominate Gamma World. This list is not complete, but it is a fine start. I found myself amazed at the degree of detail put into this product. The previous three editions failed to produce believable foes or a gritty, earthy feel to the game world.

Overview: The GAMMA WORLD® game, fourth edition is very well developed. My complaint with the previous three versions was against the indifferent development of the game world and its uninteresting approach to the idea of a post-apocalyptic setting. The game was fun to play, but didn't cut it as an alternative to better developed games. This edition pushed my doubts aside. The book sets a new standard for organization and clarity in gaming manuals, from its front page to the complete index in the back. You'll enjoy this one. It's on my list for the Origins Awards.

GAMMA WORLD, fourth edition
Science Fiction Role Playing Game
Publisher: TSR Incorporated
Price: $20.00
Designers: James M. Ward and Bruce Nesmith



About the Cover

Artist Terry Pavlet sketched this brooding image of Art's Haven, a Living City business whose owners share a common grief.

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NEWSZINE

Volume 12, Number 12
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SPECIAL FEATURE

8 **A Fluffy Wonderland – by Rick Reid**
A vile dognapping has disrupted the festivities this Wondertime eve. Can you track down the villains and restore holiday joy to Ealow?

FEATURES

2 **The Third Degree – by Jeff Cisneros**
Our dauntless gumshoe seeks out the truth about new role playing products. His first "case" is the GAMMA WORLD® game, 4th edition.

7 **Kenderspeak Anyone? – by Harold Johnson and John Terra**
Bring the richness of Krynn languages into your campaign.

17 **The Living City – by Randall Lemon**
Meet the businessmen who've banded together at Art's Haven, an old brownstone that is home to music, portraits, tall tales, and a tragic past.

27 **Feats of Valor – by Todd Reynoldson**
Being a hero can be hazardous, even in a role playing game. Here's a few tips on performing deeds of courage and living to enjoy the results.

31 **Scenes of COSCON**

EDITORIAL

4 **Notes From HQ – by Jean Rabe**
News of the Game Fair and the Winter Fantasy.

5 **Letters – by the members**

DEPARTMENTS

21 **The Living Galaxy – by Roger Moore**
Weirdo SF winners revealed.

24 **The Everwinking Eye – by Ed Greenwood**
A tour of Thentia and Melvaunt, two Moonsea cities with a lot in common.

26 **Into The Dark – by James Lowder**
Join our unswerving columnist for a look at films within films.

Notes From HQ

Looking Back And Looking Ahead

This past GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ Game Fair was a great success. Our tournaments were well received, we had a fine staff of volunteers manning Network HQ and marshalling events in the arena, and to top it off the convention had a record crowd.

There were plenty of highlights, too numerous to list them all. But I'll touch on a few.

Most noteworthy were our benefit tournaments. "One on Every Planet" a SPELLJAMMER® event by Tom Prusa was our traditional AD&D® game benefit event for the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. And this year, to commemorate Fluffy's 10th birthday, the proceeds from the Fluffy Quest event—"Fluffy Takes The Cake" by Rick Reid—benefitted Okada, a guide dog program for the deaf based in Fontana, WI.

In addition to the tournament proceeds, funds were raised from an impromptu auction at the members' meeting the Wednesday night before the convention.

When everything was totalled, we raised $2,000 for Okada and $2,500 for the Children's Hospital.

I want to thank everyone who participated in the tournaments, made individual donations, and purchased items at the auction. You helped very worthy organizations.

Other special moments occurred when two Network members received lot's-o-prizes.

Scott Schlenker of Philadelphia won the grand prize at the convention—one year's worth of everything TSR, Inc. produces. Schlenker won two specially-designated ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game tournaments, the Feature and the SPELLJAMMER game Benefit, and was the high scorer out of all the participants in those tournaments. The prize, which will span the next year, is worth hundreds of dollars.

The other major prize was won by Paul Gosselin of Methuen, MA. Gosselin, the high scorer in the Special event, "Hour of the Knife," captured one year's worth of computer games manufactured by S.S.I., one of the nation's leaders in computer role playing games.

Those victories were significant accomplishments, and Network HQ congratulates Scott and Paul.

We're already making plans for next year's Game Fair. In fact, the very next issue of this Newszine will contain our schedule of events so you can sign up to judge and make your plans to play.

Please, please, please—if you know you are coming to next year's convention, sign up early to judge. You have a much better chance to get the events you want, and you will make life easier for us.

And Speaking Of Cons....

Winter Fantasy is coming up quick. It will be held at MECCA (well, in a portion of MECCA), the site of the GEN CON Game Fair. We hope to see you there. It's the Network's own convention, and it is filled with brand new events, exciting miniature games, board games, war games and more.

The Party's Over

This year has marked Fluffy's 10th birthday, and we've celebrated it through contests, tournaments and by publishing adventures in the Newszine—including the festive offering this issue.

The party is drawing to a close, but Fluffy's creator Rick Reid has something grand in store for us next year.

You see, next year marks the D&D® game's 20th anniversary. Rick has promised to write a D&D game Fluffy event. We're sure it will be amusing.

Thanks, Rick, for providing 10 years of Fluffy fun. We're looking forward to what you and Fluffy will bring us in the years to come.

Thanks

Thanks this time around go to all the wonderful members who helped at the Game Fair: to Chris Schon, who was in charge of Network HQ on site; Mitzi Young, Glenn Overby, Dawn Snell, Carol Robinson, and Scott Douglas who assisted him; Liz and Gary Williams who ran the art show and art auction; Mike Selinker and his tireless crew of impeccably-dressed marshals; Rembert and Beverly Parker for handling the masquerade; Cheryl Frech, our Feature coordinator who took all the over-sold slots in stride; Bruce Nesmith, who turned an idea into a three-round Ravenloft event, "Hour of the Knife" that drew rave reviews and packed time slots; Tom Prusa, for tons of tournaments; Darryl Behling and his crew for coordinating the AD&D Game Open; Len Bland for giving us another great year of ZEF; Dave Franze and company for the DRAGONLANCE® game Mystery Quest; Wes Nicholson, Chris Ryan, and David McPaul from Australia who came early to help with the preparations; Marshall Simpson from Ohio who joined them; all of our event coordinators who worked hard to get the game masters prepared and who made sure the events ran smoothly; all of our authors who gave us top-notch events for the Silver Anniversary of the Game Fair; and to the DMs who made playing in the events possible.

Take Care,

Jean

❑

Letters

Victims, Tournaments, Conventions And Contests

A couple of years ago, I remember you published an interview with R.A. Salvatore under the *Bookwyrms* column. I (as well as my non-member friends) thoroughly enjoy reading about authors and game designers that we respect. It's interesting knowing about the "person behind the byline," and I believe future issues of the Newszine would be better balanced and more entertaining if you sought out new victims to showcase.

In many installments of *Notes From HQ*, Jean gets personal, citing specific names and detailing their contributions to the Network and gaming in general. I believe it to be very important that we periodically touch on the extraordinary people that make these wonderful games possible.

So please, don't nail the coffer shut on this feature, like DRAGON® Magazine did to its long-deceased TSR Profiles!

Alex Iwanow
East Brunswick, NJ

People features. Great idea, Alex. Give us a couple of issues and you'll start seeing them.

We'll focus on game designers, editors, industry veterans, and top RPGA™ Network players and judges. If there's someone in particular you'd like us to feature, drop us a line and we'll see what we can do.

Points and Conventions

I wanted to write for several reasons. First, I just wanted to say that I really enjoy your Newszine! It's interesting, informative and amusing; keep up the good work!

Second, I wanted to comment on Robert Cannon's letter from several issues ago. I totally agree with him. Though not in what he terms the "young gamers" category (I'm 15), I can definitely sympathize and identify with Robert's complaints and observations. Not being able to drive to sessions or conventions—my age is the only reason I've never attended a convention—is a big nuisance. I also think your idea about a 16-and-under tournament is great.

Third, I loved the crossword puzzle; keep adding them! As for logic puzzles, here I have to differ with Robert; I really like them (I really like semi-colons, too).

Fourth, I wanted to let Mr. Lowder know that I really like his column, not because I'm likely to rent any of the movies he reviews, but because his reviews, particularly the nasty ones, are so funny!!

Fifth, (no, this is not an *eversmoking letter*), I wanted to know if any convention offering RPGA Network events will earn points; or is it only at the GEN CON® Game Fair? I'm a new member; excuse the probably silly question.

Arthur Bahr
St. Louis, MO

Thanks for the kind words, Arthur. From the mail we get it's obvious others enjoy the crossword puzzles, too.

As for conventions and points—anytime you participate in a tournament or Network activity at a convention you will receive points, provide you and the event organizer complete the required paperwork. The points are applied to your ranking as a player or judge, depending on whether you played in or ran the tournament. The more points you earn, the higher level player or judge you become.

Look for an upcoming issue in which we go more into detail on our tournament program, point system, and other Network benefits.

Too Much of the AD&D Game?

I'd like to ask one question: why do you always only print articles for the AD&D game? I am just starting to play the Marvel Super Heroes game. I once played the D&D game, but I stopped because I couldn't find any materials for it.

I know about the columns *With Great Power* and *The Living Galaxy*, but I'd like to see more items for other games like Marvel Super Heroes, the GAMMA WORLD® game and the BOOT HILL® game, etc.

I know that the AD&D game is very popular, but I'm sure that I speak for everyone who plays games other than the AD&D game. We want more columns for other games. I know that you only have so much room in your Newszine, so you can't have columns on all the games at once. But you don't have to always print AD&D game columns.

T.E.
Wappingers Falls, NY

POLYHEDRON® Newszine will continue to focus on the AD&D® game, simply because that is what the majority of the readers want, T.E. However, we agree with you that other games need to be featured more often. For example, take a look at this issue. We have

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included a review of the GAMMA WORLD® game. Next issue we'll have two mutated plants for game masters to use and more GAMMA WORLD material. As for the D&D game, we'd love to print some articles. We need to get them first, however. (That's a hint to potential authors.)

Next year marks the D&D game's 20th anniversary. We have a couple of things planned to celebrate—but we're not going to reveal them just yet.

Dead Deadlines

I have a few things to say about the POLYHEDRON® Newszine, having just received issue #73. I was reading the *Notes From HQ* section and saw the competition concerning creating your own traps. I thought, "Ah, this looks good. I think I'll enter." So I read through the rules. Everything was good until I saw the deadline: August 1st...oh...I was reading this on August 15th, the day I received the Newszine. I think there is a slight problem with the mail service, don't you think.

Secondly, I have another comment on the same Newszine. I enjoyed the short articles like "Take My Advice" by Ryan McRae and "Starting From Scratch" by Thomas Valley because they are to the point and interesting. If you are not interested in the subject you have only lost one page, as opposed to three or four for longer articles. That's all I have to say for now.

Lawrence Hurley
Herefordshire, England

Lawrence, sorry you got your Newszine so late. We ship Newszines from the United States to England by sea, and sometimes that means members in England don't get the Newszine as quickly as members in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere.

We'll allow more time for future contests. We have to be careful, though. We've found that sometimes when we allow too much time, people forget about the contests.

Wither Fluffy?

Now that the GEN CON® Game Fair is over, I've had time to look back and reflect. I must say there seemed to be a record crowd present. I came a day early just to beat them. Little good it did. Even the pre-registration line was busy. The auction line across the street was also somewhat of a wait.

The one thing that disturbed me the most was our Wednesday night members meeting. Here we are celebrating 25 years of the Game Fair and 10 years of Fluffy Quest. I know everyone was on a high energy level, ready to get the gaming started. That just doesn't excuse the rudeness some individuals displayed during the part of the meeting devoted to Fluffy. Now I realize not everyone likes every game. I'm the first to admit there are some not to my liking. Like it or not, those individuals who booed and shouted "Kill Fluffy" were rude, rude, rude. I'd also be interested to know how many of those Fluffy haters have actually played the game. I'd bet not very many—if any at all.

Fluffy was created by a very talented man. He developed Fluffy as an alternative to all the hack-n-slash going on at the time. It was a fun change and a game that fit all ages and genders. He has put many hours of his time into Fluffy. I really feel he does a super job and he does not need this year's antics from some unbelievers.

I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Reid becomes a no-show for future Game Fairs. Could you blame him?

Another point. How many other games raised $2,000 for charity? I challenge all of you people who were so rude to Fluffy to match or beat that figure.

Enough said. I know the author, and I know all that goes on with Fluffy and her friends. Three cheers for Fluffy and her creator Rick Reid.

Now that I've got that off my chest I feel better. The GEN CON Game Fair and many of the other conventions are great places to get together with other gamers. I've met some wonderful people and made a great many friends. I look forward to coming back each year. There are just some things a person sees that could use a change. On the whole, gamers are a great bunch of people. I look forward to every chance I get to be involved with gaming.

Carmen Skinner
Camanche, IA

Carmen, Fluffy is pretty special to the staff of the RPGA® Network. In fact, Fluffy's been around longer than any current staff members.

To us, Fluffy Quest tournaments represent light-hearted fun. The tournaments are well-written, creative, and they have a sizeable following at the GEN CON Game Fair and other conventions. At this past Game Fair, we ran 51 tables of five-and six-player teams of Fluffy Quest. The only single-round event to surpass that was the traditional AD&D® game Benefit Tournament.

Each year when we put out a judge appeal for the Game Fair we receive many applications marked "Fluffy judge."

We, too, were bothered by some of the boos and other reactions. But we're taking it in stride. There are a lot more Fluffy fans than detractors.

An Award to Share

I regret that I was unable to attend the GEN CON® Game Fair this year. I would like to thank you for selecting me as a recipient of a Network Service Award because of my work with the Joe Martin Fund for the American Cancer Society.

This would not be possible without a lot of help from other people, so I must insist on sharing this award with the following:

1. The members of the Evansville Gaming Guild who volunteer their time to host Glathricon, the convention that raises money for the Joe Martin Fund.
2. The artists, dealers and individuals who donate items to be auctioned off for the Joe Martin Fund.
3. The gamers who generously give money to this worthy cause.

Since Glathricon was the first convention to start raising money for a charity, we are glad to be able to donate thousands of dollars to the American Cancer Society each year.

Joe Martin was a very generous person himself, and it makes me very proud of the successful effort in his honor. It seemed to be the least I could do for a good person and a great gamer, who unfortunately died of cancer at the age of 33.

P.S. I would like to invite every gamer to attend Glathricon which will be held June 18-20 in Evansville, IN.

Jeri McGraw
Newburgh, IN

Kenderspeak Anyone?

Adding Krynn Languages To Your Campaign

by H. Johnson and J. Terra

Krynn's Common language traces its origins to scholars in ancient Ishtar who developed it to enhance trade and diplomacy. The language came into public use some 200 years after its creation, and today versions of a Common tongue are spoken by most human and demi-human adults in Ansalon.

Common is based on Ergothian roots, but it contains words and elements from other languages, including Elvish, Dwarvish, Solamnic and Gnomish. There are even words drawn from Kenderspeak and goblin tongues.

People from the demi-human races also speak a dialect of their own racial language, in addition to Common. Neither Common nor personal racial languages count against the number of additional languages that a character can learn.

Language Components

Most languages use spoken words, but there are three known Krynn tongues that include gestures, inflections, and staccato tones. Kenderspeak is the best example of a language that uses all of these elements. A shrug, a finger twirled in the air, or a firm thump of a staff adds an entirely different inflection and meaning to a sentence. Dwarves use a percussive signalling with hammers, stones or prybars, tapping out a message on stone in "Hammertalk" that can echo throughout their caverns. Gnomes talk inordinately fast, and their messages are so packed with meaning that they often use wild gestures and expressions as a shorthand to getting the gist of the message across.

A few known languages use short words and hand gestures to communicate. Plains barbarians have developed hand signalling, or signing, to converse with other tribes or to communicate silently while hunting.

Thieves Cant comprises gestures as well as "cant" (idiomatic and slang terms used to refer to thieving operations). Thieves Cant is designed to convey information between rogues while leaving other listeners confused and uninformed.

Finally, there is Gully Talk, the traditional language of the Aghar, the so-called gully dwarf. Gully Talk is akin to the language developed by hobos to communicate important survival tips to others. While Gully Talk can make the speakers sound stupid and confused, the language actually carries a world of meaning for Aghar. It is not a simple language to learn, and it changes continually based on the introduction of new ideas and activities into Aghar communities.

Uncommon Racial Languages

Many languages exist on Krynn that few player characters are able to comprehend without a lot of study. These include languages spoken by races of intelligent monsters, such as Irda, Kyrie, Huldre Folk, Shadow People, and Bakalli, as well as tongues spoken by races the heroes are unlikely to visit long enough to learn the language, such as Dwarvish—Daergar/Theiwar & Zhakar, Elvish—Kagonesti, Dimernesti and Dargonesti; and, of course, the language of dragons. Feel free to create others.

Many other creatures have their own languages or language groups. These, too, can be chosen as learnable languages. However, since most other creatures are either rare, hostile, or live in hard to reach places, a character must seek out the respective creature in order to learn the language. The languages in parentheses are related subgroups being derived from a common tongue.

Centaur* (Wemic)
Dargoi (Merman, triton, nixie, nymph, sea hag)
Giant (Ettin)
Goblinoid* (Troll, hobgoblin, gnoll)
Kyrie
Bakalli (Lizard Man)
Naga*
Slig
Sylvan (Giant owl, sylph, brownie, satyr, sprite, pixie, treant)
Thanoi

Spoken Languages

Frym the Inept comes upon a group of ogres. Fortunately, Frym speaks Ogre, so he tells them, "I come to you with open hands, I mean you no harm."

But what if Frym had to make a Proficiency Check? And what if the DM rolled it, and Frym wound up failing the Check? The ogres might hear Frym say "I come at you with flailing hands, I mean to harm." Poor Frym would garner quite a different reaction!

To reflect the uncertainty of speaking a non-native language, use Spoken Language, a General nonweapon proficiency, based on Intelligence with no modifier. Humans can speak Common fluently, and demi-humans can speak Common and their racial tongue fluently, without needing an ability check. Use the checks when they are speaking other languages.

When speaking a language that has dialects, distinguished by an asterisk "*," a penalty modifier of −2 is added. This reflects the difficulty in sorting through the vernacular and choosing the right idioms.

The following is a list of the major languages of Ansalon. This list should be consulted when players choose languages for their characters. The characters are still restricted by their Intelligence scores, as specified in the *Player's Handbook*. Languages followed by an asterisk (*) have many regional dialects, divided by tribe or race.

❑

Abanasinian* (plains barbarians)	Elvish, Silvanesti	Khur
Draconian Common (also spoken by dragons)	Ergothian	Lemish
Dwarvish, Gully Talk	Gnomish	Minotaur
Dwarvish, Hylar*	Goblin*	Nerakese
Dwarvish, Neidhar	Hammer Talk	Nordmaarian
Sign Language	Kalinese	Ogre*
Elvish, Qualinesti	Kenderspeak*	
	Karolian	Solamnic

A Fluffy Wonderland

by Rick Reid

An AD&D 2nd Edition Game Adventure
for 4-6 Characters, Levels 4-6

Illustration by Terry Pavlet

The Night Before Wondertime

The tree is up, the wreaths are hung, the apple cider is bubbling in the pot, and colorful paper chains are strung across the doorways. As you sit back to observe your handiwork, contented grins spread over your faces. Everything looks perfect.

However, a loud rapping at the door interrupts your holiday thoughts. There in the doorway stands Penny, the mayor of Ealow, looking radiant in her fox-fur coat lightly dusted with a powdering of new fallen snow. Next to her is a sack bulging with odd-shaped objects.

Penny addresses everyone with a tentative "Season's Greetings," then her lower lip begins to tremble and her eyes fill with tears. Burying her face in her hands, she begins to sob, "What will I do? What will I do?" She quickly apologizes for her display of emotions and begs you to hear her story.

"It started out on such a happy note," Penny whimpers. Two days ago, we received a message that Fluffy's canine relatives, who she has not seen in years, would be joining us this Wondertime. They were to arrive today by carriage from Dogtown, with sacks of presents for the local orphans. Fluffy was so excited that she wouldn't even sample my plum pudding—and that's her favorite.

"A few hours ago, we departed to the station to await the carriage. When some time had past I began to think that perhaps I made some mistake on the arrival time. Just as I was ready to leave, the carriage flew into the station. The driver, looking as if all the demons of Heck were pursing him, was wild-eyed. His hair had turned white and his lips were pale blue.

"The poor man said the carriage had been waylaid in Snow Valley by a group of odd-looking, but dangerous blue creatures wearing fringed leather jerkins, pointed-toed shoes, and tasseled hats. The driver had great difficulty telling me all of this, as his tongue had been frostbitten. The creatures emptied the carriage of its cargo. Then, noticing the passengers, the blue creatures became agitated and demanded that they disembark. When the last dog had exited the carriage, one of the

creatures slapped the lead horse on the rump. The frightened horses took off with the driver hanging on for dear life.

"Although in obvious pain, the driver was able to fashion a crude map for me, showing where the attack took place. (Show the players the map.)

"I know it's Wondertime eve, and I know you are in the midst of your festivities, but I don't know who else to turn to for help. When Fluffy realized that her relatives had been dognapped, she went into catatonic shock. She's at home right now, staring glassy-eyed at the tree, an untouched cup of eggnog at her feet.

"What I ask of you is that you return to the scene of the crime and try to recover the abducted dogs and the orphans' gifts."

If the PCs accept the job, Penny explains that three one-horse open sleighs have been provided for their transportation. Each sleigh can carry two passengers. The horses know the way back home, so the PCs don't need to worry about becoming lost. If the PCs bring up the matter of payment, Penny agrees to any fee they propose—within reason. After thanking the characters and wishing them the best of luck, Penny opens the sack and pulls gaily wrapped packages from its depths. She hands the gifts to the characters, while explaining: "I almost forgot. Here are your Wondertime presents. Perhaps you should open them now, as you may find them useful in your journey." With that, she departs.

Read each player the "Wondertime Gift" list for his particular character detailed on pages 14, 15 and 16.

A Warm Send Off

As the PCs exit the building after completing their preparations for the journey, they see the three sleighs waiting at the roadside. The sleighs are surrounded by six angelic faced youngsters who break into song, which sounds something like this (feel free to substitute the PCs' names for a better effect):

Jingle Bells, Sassy smells,
Spittle laid an egg,
Sizzle and Soapy act real dopey,
And Sputrock ran away.

After completing their song, the children bow and hold out their hands to the party for a gratuity.

Whether the PCs reward the singers, they find themselves pelted with a barrage of snowballs as they make their way out of town.

Angelic-faced youngsters (6): Int Average; AL Obstreperous; AC 8; MV 12 (15 if being chased); HD 1-1; hp 2 each; THAC0 20; #AT 2/1 (snowballs); Dmg 0-1 subdual damage; SA satirical carols, +3 "to hit" with snowballs; SZ M; ML 8; XP nil.

Over The River And Through The Woods

Temperature: 15 above zero
Wind: 30 MPH
Time: 4:00 PM
Snowfall: 6"

Although there are several inches of snow on the ground and the wind is brisk, the road out of Ealow is still visible and passable. The horses do indeed seem to know the way, and you are able to snuggle back into the heavy blankets to enjoy the scenery as you enter the beautiful Woody Forest west of town. The bare branches of the trees glisten with a glaze of ice, and the only sound you hear is the wind blowing through the ice-covered branches. There is a lone squirrel shivering on one of the frozen branches. He holds out his paw as you pass, as if begging for a spare nut to feed his family.

Shivering Squirrel: Int Animal; AL Hungry; AC 9; MV 18; HD 1 hp; hp 1; THAC0 20; #AT nil; Dmg nil; SZ T; ML 2; XP see below.

If the PCs feed the squirrel, praise them for spreading Wondertime cheer to our small, furry friends (600 XP).

The Old Man Who Walks Backwards

You are approximately a half hour out of town when the horses suddenly snort and rear. A bobbing, yellow light is visible on the road. As the light gets closer, you distinguish the figure of an old man with long stringy hair and a beard. The light is a lantern he is carrying. He is walking backwards.

As the man comes up alongside the sleighs, he holds his lantern up to examine the PCs' faces. With a satisfied nod he speaks:

"I am the Old Man Who Walks Backwards. I see where I've been, but not where I'm going. On your journey this eve you will be visited by three ghosts. Heed their words of wisdom."

After speaking, the old man continues his backward walk. If the party attempts to question the old man, he answers all inquiries with, "Seek and ye shall find."

The Old Man Who Walks Backwards: Int Average; AL N; AC 10; MV 8; HD F0; hp 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2 (with lantern); SZ M; ML 9; XP nil.

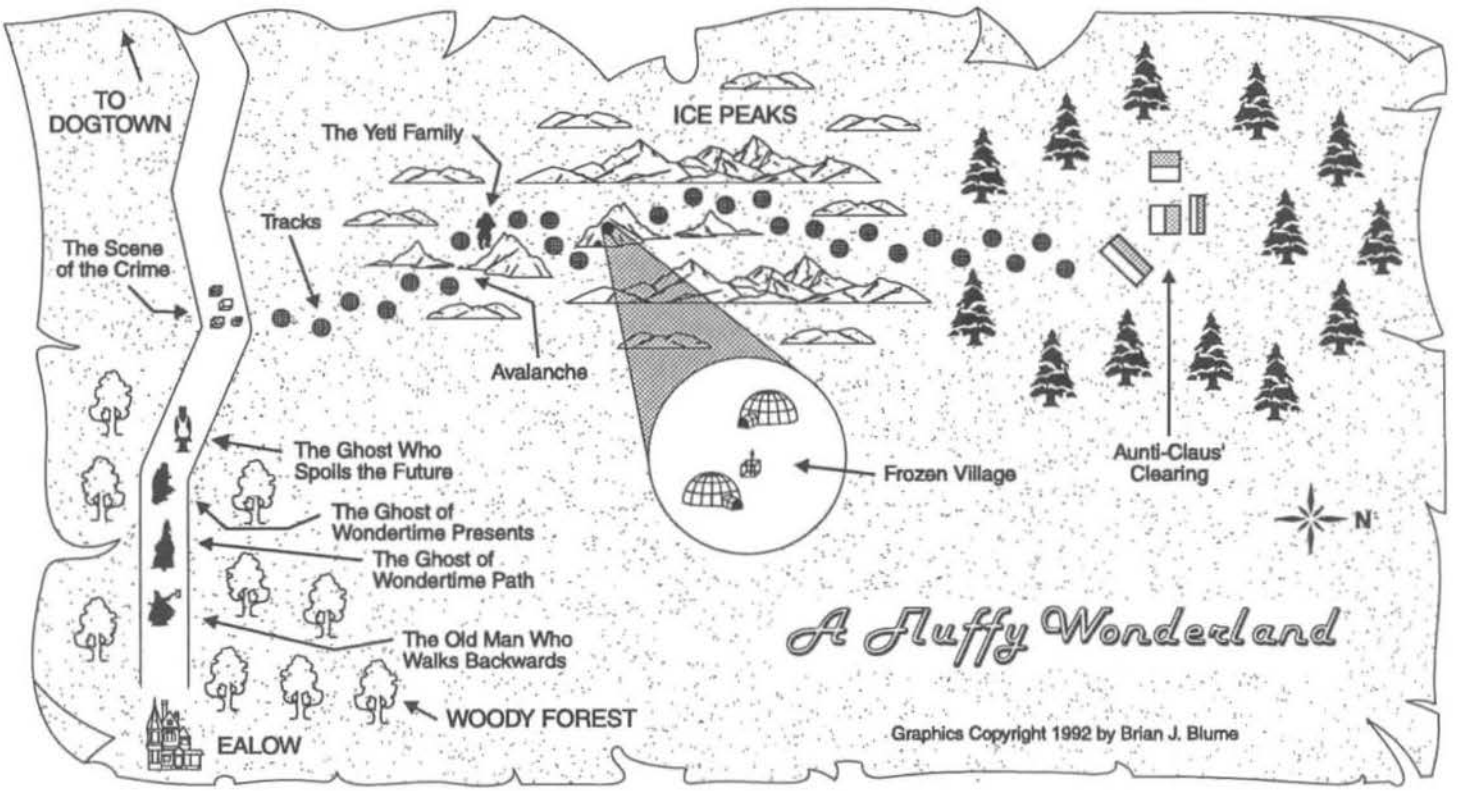
The First Ghost

You have traveled approximately 100 yards when you notice a swirling of snowflakes directly ahead. A ghostly form slowly materializes in the road. The spectre resembles a middle-aged, pot-bellied man with a large bulbous nose. The spook is dressed in tattered clothes and is carrying a wide-bladed shovel. In a chilling voice, the ghost speaks:

"Oooo! Oooooo! I am the Ghost of Wondertime Path. In life it was my duty to keep the road clear and shoveled. One Wondertime Eve I partook too heavily of the rum cake and fell asleep, neglecting my duty. When I awoke, I found that my carelessness had caused a wagon with a cargo of partridges, calling birds and turtle doves to become mired in a snow drift. It had overturned, releasing the fowl to the four winds. Needless to say, Wondertime was ruined. Now in death I must atone for my sins. Every Wondertime Eve I must appear in this spot to right my wrong. My spirit will find no rest until the path is clear. Ooooo! Ooooo! Woe is me!"

After his speech, the ghost attempts to clear the path with his insubstantial shovel. Naturally, he has no luck, as the shovel just passes through the snow. The ghost will not allow the party to pass until his work is done (an impossible feat), and he will attack if they attempt to get by him.

Thus, the group has two options. They can fight and defeat the ghost, or they



can disembark and clear the path for him, using whatever means are at their disposal. If they choose to do the latter, the ghost will step back to survey their work, pointing out spots that they missed, until the path is cleared to his satisfaction. When the path is clear, the ghost fades away, leaving them with a final warning to "Beware the rum cake!"

The Ghost of Wondertime Path: Int High; AL LE; AC 0; MV 9; HD 10; hp 61; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg Age 10-40 years; SD hit only by silver (1/2 dmg) or magic (full dmg); SZ M; ML 20; XP 7,000 (slay)/9,000 (clearing the path).

The Second Ghost

Another hundred yards brings more swirling snow and the ghostly figure of a bent, sour-faced old man. In his hand is a large, ghostly gift-wrapped box tied with a spectral ribbon. The spook cocks his head, fixes the group with a beady stare and chuckles:

"Heeenh! Heeenh! I am the Ghost of Wondertime Presents. Throughout my miserly life, I never gave anyone a Wondertime present. I kept them all to myself! Now, in the afterlife, it is my punishment to appear once every Wondertime eve and give someone a gift. If my gift is not accepted, my soul will find no rest. Heeenh! Heeenh!"

The ghost holds out the box to the party and says, "Here, take it. I made it myself." If someone accepts the present, the ghost rubs his hands together gleefully and cackles, "Open it! Open it!"

If the present is not accepted, the ghost rants at the party, "What do I have to do, shove it down your throats? Take the blasted thing!" If the present is still not accepted, the ghost drops the gift and attacks. Anyone who accepts the gift finds that it appears very light and insubstantial. Undoing the ribbon causes the box lid to fly open, and a ghostly, but very solid, mail-gloved hand springs out, striking anyone holding the box for 1d12 points of damage. If this happens, the ghost doubles over with laughter, joyfully shouting, "Ha! Ha! Sucker! That gets 'em every year!"

Before the party can retaliate, the ghost fades away leaving his parting words echoing through the night, "Beware of ghosts bearing gifts!"

The Ghost of Wondertime Presents: Int High; AL LE; AC 0; MV 9; HD 10; hp 61; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg Age 10-40 years; SD hit only by silver (1/2 dmg) or magic (full dmg); SZ M; ML Special; XP 7,000.

The Third Ghost

One hundred more yards, a swirling of snow, and the semi-material figure of a fat crone, head swathed in a turban, appears in the road. In one hand she holds a large, red Wondertime ball on a string. While swinging the ball slowly back and forth, she relates her story:

"Cackle! Cackle! I am the Ghost Who Spoils the Future. In life I snooped in all my presents and always knew what I was going to get. Now, in death, my mission is to spoil Wondertime for everyone else. Step closer while I gaze into my crystal ornament and tell you what you will receive on Wondertime morn. Cackle! Cackle!"

Whether the group wants to hear it, the ghost gazes into her ball and begins relating the following "futures" to each of them (in no particular order):

"You will receive a frilly dress from your great, great grandmother, who still thinks you're six years old. And you will be forced to wear it to keep peace in the family.

"Your sister puts salt instead of sugar in the Wondertime cookies. You will spend the day in bed with a stomach ache.

"Your stocking will have a large hole in it, and the dog will eat all your candy.

"Your brother will get up early and open all your presents, keeping the best ones for himself.

"The tags on your presents and your spinster aunt's were accidentally switched. She will receive your presents, and you will receive toilet water and a girdle.

"None of your gifts will fit, and you can't exchange them."

The only way to stop the ghost is to attack her. Otherwise, the party will be forced to listen to all her predictions, each punctuated with cackling laughter. When she has finished, the ghost fades away, her parting words being, "You will never get what you ask for."

The Ghost Who Spoils The Future: Int High; AL LE; AC 0; MV 9; HD 10; hp 61; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg Age 10-40 years; SD hit only by silver (1/2 dmg) or magic (full dmg); SZ M; ML Special; XP 7,000.

When this last ghost disappears, phantom letters spontaneously appear in the snow reading "See you next year!"

The Scene of the Crime

You travel for approximately another hour when you see what appears to be the setting of the abduction. Ripped packages are scattered about an area churned up by carriage tracks, hoof prints and odd, circular foot prints.

There are about a dozen wolves milling about. They have long, silky black coats and white faces. The wolves are rooting through the packages, eating candy canes and jelly rolls.

The largest wolf, the apparent leader, lifts its head at the party's approach and howls through jelly-smeared jaws. Immediately, the other wolves set up a howl in three-part harmony.

The 12 choir wolves snarl at the party, still in three-part harmony, and leap to attack if the PCs move any closer. Naturally, the horses will become very agitated and try to run away (45% chance per round of bolting and running). The wolves continue their attack until at least half their number have been killed. The remainder run for the hills, grabbing a stray pastry and howling in three-part harmony all the while.

Choir Wolves (12): Int Semi; AL N; AC 6; MV 18; HD 4+4; hp 32, 32, 30, 28, 27, 27, 25, 23, 23, 23, 20, 18; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8; SZ S; ML 10; XP 175 each.

There is not much left at the site except bits of colored paper and packaging, pieces of food and a few abandoned toys. The circular tracks contain a cross-hatch pattern and seem to run in pairs. They lead to the north in the direction of the Ice Peaks. There are approximately eight pairs of tracks.

Avalanche

Once off the road, the going becomes slower. The horses must plod through the knee-high snow drifts. Following the tracks, which seem to run on top of the snow, the party eventually comes to the base of the tall peaks. A narrow passage running through the peaks becomes visible as the PCs approach the base. The tracks lead into and through the pass. The snow here is piled high, making it almost impossible to continue with the horses. In fact, the horses will stop. If the horses are sent back, they will easily find their way home.

The passage, though 15 feet wide, is filled with snowdrifts ranging from about knee high to almost waist high. After the PCs have traveled a short way trough the passage, they hear a loud rumbling. Looking up, the characters see a large mass of snow and ice sliding down from the peak on the left. There is no way the PCs can avoid the avalanche in the narrow passage. The avalanche will do 1d10 damage to whoever it hits. However, if the characters manage to curl up into a ball, or get under the sleighs (if the sleighs are still with them) they will avoid the full brunt of the avalanche and suffer half damage instead.

When the avalanche has subsided, the PCs find themselves buried in snow up to their necks.

The Yeti Family

Overhead, the PCs see four white, hairy, ape-like faces peering down from the peak 20 feet above. The largest creature wags his finger at the PCs and says, "There! That fix you bad mans! You no more cause trouble for yeti!" This said, all four creatures shake their heads in agreement.

There are four yeti in the family; mother, father, sister and brother. The yeti are convinced that the PCs are part of the group that has been hijacking the wagons and stirring up trouble in the area. When the yeti saw the PCs coming, they loosened a hugh pile of snow on the top of the hill, causing the avalanche.

If the PCs talk to the yeti, they will be told, "You bad mans. You steal from wagons, yeti get blame. We see you while ago. We fix trap for you. Now you no more cause trouble."

The PCs must try to convince the yeti that they are not the ones robbing the wagons, and in fact are on their trail. If they are successful, the father yeti replies, "Huumm! All mans look same to yeti. We sorry. We dig you out now."

The yeti scramble down the slope, and with the frenzied digging of their long powerful arms, they have the party free in no time.

The father introduces his family. "Me Freddi Yeti, wife is Betti Yeti, son is Eddi Yeti and daughter is Hetti Yeti."

If asked about the direction the robbers had gone, one of the young yeti replies, "Me see bad mans take shortcut cave to village of icy mens. Me show you."

The yeti will lead the party about 50 yards down the passage to a barely visible 6' wide by 8' high natural cavern on the right hand side of the passage. The horses and sleighs definitely cannot fit. Before the yeti take leave of the party, they give the PCs goodbye hugs, squeezing the air from the PCs' lungs and bruising a few ribs in the process.

Yeti (4): Int Average; AL N; AC 6; MV 15; HD 4+4; hp 32, 30, 15, 15; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1-6/1-6; SA Squeeze; SD Immune to normal cold, invisible in snow and ice; SZ L; ML 14; XP 420 each.

The Frozen Village

The tunnel is a natural shortcut through the hills and leads north. After walking several yards through the

twisting and turning passage, the group enters a cavern that is approximately 100 yards in diameter. It is open to the sky above. Tall snow-covered peaks tower above the 30′ high opening, and the tunnel continues on the other side of the cavern.

Inside the cavern is a small village of igloos. On the outskirts of the village is a 12′ tall totem pole composed of crude figures hugging themselves and making lewd faces. Long-frozen wolf skins are stretched across racks, and the remains of cooking fires can be seen outside the igloos.

In the center of the village is a 6′ by 6′ block of ice with a finely crafted long sword firmly embedded in the center. Everything in the village seems coated in a layer of frost. There is no sign of life.

Inside the igloos are human families frozen in a tableaux of everyday life. Some have spoons in frozen soup, are getting dressed in frozen clothing, or are bathing in a tub of frozen water. If all the igloos are searched, approximately two dozen frozen villagers will be discovered. There is nothing of real value inside the igloos except for a few primitive wall hangings.

One of the largest igloos contains a man hunched over a writing desk, frozen in the act of penning an ice-covered diary. Through the glaze of frost, the PCs can discern the following:

I fear that Mt. Frostbite is due to erupt sooner than I anticipated. I try my best to warn the others, but my words are not heeded. If the unthinkable does take place, and we are caught in its spume of icy death, I pray someone will come along and free us from the fingers of... Uh oh!! What's that noise? Oooops! Too late!

The villagers were indeed caught in the eruption of Mt. Frostbite, which occurred several decades ago. When the snow volcano erupted, it covered the entire village in a layer of icy frost, freezing everyone immediately.

If the PCs attempt to pull the sword from the block of ice, they will discover it a difficult task. It takes a combined Strength of 30 to pull the sword from the block of ice. Once this is done, the ice cube melts and the sword begins pulsing with a red glow, radiating waves of heat. The sword continues glowing until the wielder drops or sheathes it. However, in order to drop or sheathe the sword, the user must successfully save vs. spells or find the sword has frozen to his hands (yep, it can be hot AND cold at the same time—it's magic).

The sword will stay frozen to the hands of the user for 1d4 + 1 turns, at which time the glow disappears, the heat fades, and the blade becomes a normal long sword. When energized, the sword is +2 to hit and does 1d12 damage to creatures of any size. It is also considered a fire-based weapon, but will only work in this capacity for the person who originally freed it from the cube of ice. The heat doesn't harm the wielder—but the DM™ should feel free to describe the searing heat coming from the sword.

A few minutes after the sword has been freed, the PCs hear a crackling noise coming from the igloos. Emerging from the igloos, dripping water and shedding layers of ice, are the 24 villagers, now animated frosty zombies.

The blue-skinned zombies shuffle toward the sword, grunting "ah," rubbing their hands, and attacking anyone who gets in their way. They converge around the sword and follow it everywhere, unless they are turned or destroyed.

Frosty zombies (24): Int Non; AL N; AC 8; MV 6; HD 2; hp 10 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 plus creepy cold shivers; SD Immune to cold, double damage from fire; SZ M; ML Special; XP 65 each.

On the opposite side of the village, the PCs can again pick up the trail of the odd tracks. The tracks lead through another 200 yards of twisting cavern and emerge on the other side of the range of hills into a grove of tall pine trees.

The Creature That Hated Wondertime

Picking up the trail of the strange tracks, you eventually come upon a clearing set into a low depression. You notice several of the trees circling the clearing have been cut down. Four buildings stand in the clearing. The two largest are rectangular and appear to be barns or barracks. The tracks lead directly to the closest large building.

The Barn

This building is approximately 100′ long and 50′ wide. The front wall has a set of huge 20′ by 20′ double doors secured with a large lock. Near the doors are three snow drow building a decidedly untraditional snow figure of a voluptuous elf woman.

The snow drow resemble regular drow except that their skin is a very pale blue and their hair and eyes are snow white. All the drow are dressed in red and green leather pants and jerkins. Atop their heads are tasseled red caps, and on their feet are tasseled green shoes. They carry scimitars tucked into their shiny black belts. If the PCs defeat and search the snow drow, they find six pieces of sticky candy gold pieces, a sprig of mistletoe, and a key to the lock on the barn.

Snow Drow (3): Int High; AL NE; AC 7; MV 12; HD F3; hp 21 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA +1 "to hit" with bow or sword; SD 90% resistance to *sleep, charm,* or cold-based attacks; SZ M; ML 13; XP 175 each.

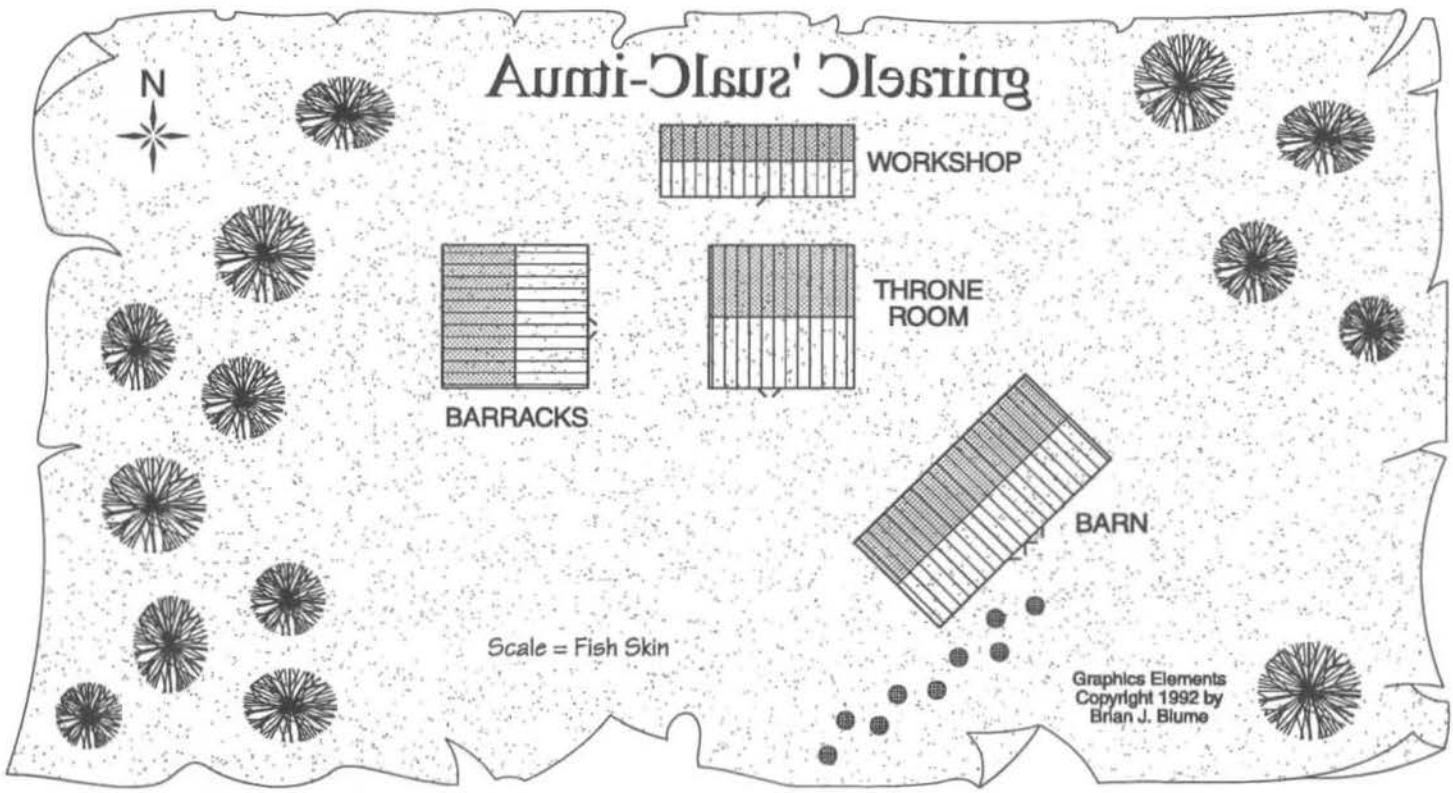
Inside the barn is a huge sleigh laden with two large sacks. Hitched to the front of the sleigh, looking thoroughly miserable, are 10 fluffy white dogs. Each dog has a pair of tree branch antlers attached to its head and a gold medallion around its neck. The lead dog is also outfitted with a red rubber ball on its nose. These dogs are Fluffy's missing relatives, dognapped by the snow drow to pull Auntie Claus's evil sleigh. The medallions read "Puffy," "Huffy," "Cousin Tuffy," "Buffy," "Muffy," "Duffy," "Scuffy," "Ruffy," "Great Aunt Stuffy," and on the lead dog "Grandpa Gruffy."

The sacks are filled with willow switches, lumps of coal, broken toys with sharp protrusions, books with missing pages, small objects that might be swallowed, hard candy covered with lint and dead bugs, and ugly dolls that say "nooo" when held.

Leaning against the walls of the barn, still dripping wet, are a dozen pair of crude snowshoes. The snowshoes are made of thick willow branches bent in a circle and laced with thinner bark and branches. The remainder of the barn is stacked with bales of hay.

As soon as the dogs become aware of the party's intent to rescue them, they set up a joyous yipping, yapping and howling. This chorus of joy will bring the remaining snow drow rushing from the barracks and the workshop to investigate.

When the PCs exit the barn, they find



themselves surrounded by two dozen snow drow. Each is brandishing a wicked-looking scimitar. They demand that the PCs drop their weapons and follow them to meet the "Boss."

Snow Drow (24): Int High; AL NE; AC 7; MV 12; HD F3; hp 21 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA +1 "to hit" with bow or sword; SD 90% resistance to *sleep, charm,* or cold-based attacks; SZ M; ML 13; XP 175 each.

The Throne Room

Unless the party tries to resist, the snow drow escort them to a square building behind the barn. The wooden building is 60′ long on each side and 25′ tall. When the PCs reach the 20′ tall door, the lead drow knocks the refrain of "Jingle Bells" and pushes the PCs inside.

Seated on a throne of dirty ice and snow is a 21′ tall humanoid with snow white skin and light blue hair and eyes. The creature is wearing a tattered red robe with dingy white fur trim. Her long scraggly hair and beard are intertwined with tinsel. Perched on top of her dirty blue hair is a moth-eaten red stocking cap complete with a dingy white tassel. She is wearing scuffed-up black boots and a wide black belt that has been let out several times. Tucked on the side of her belt is a yellow leather pouch. The stem of a giant briar pipe is clutched firmly between her yellowed teeth. The foul blue smoke from the pipe encircles her head like a wreath.

A Wondertime tree, decorated with broken ornaments, is set up behind the throne. On the walls are several reindeer heads and wreaths constructed of dead plants and birds. Beside the throne is a large, dirty sack and what looks like a willow switch at least three inches thick.

A huge wooden cot is set in the far corner of the room and hung upside-down above the bed is a giant striped stocking. Upon seeing the party, the creature lets forth with a loud "Raaar! Raaaar! Raaaar!" while holding her ample belly. This action causes the room to shake like jelly.

Eyeing the PCs with a wicked gleam in her eyes, the giant creature speaks:

"Come in, Come in my little friends! Sit down on the floor and make yourselves comfortable. Before I introduce myself, let me tell you a little Wondertime story.

"When I was a child, all I got for Wondertime was coal and switches, switches and coal. You don't know what it's like growing up in a chaotic evil family. No matter how good or bad you were, you always got crummy presents. I vowed then that when I grew up, I'd make sure that everyone else had as rotten a Wondertime as I did. That's why tonight, when all the little children are asleep, my dogs and I will fly through the sky visiting every one of their homes. I'll steal their presents and leave them dangerous toys, boring books, stale candy and COAL AND SWITCHES!!!!! Raaar! Raaar!

"And now, please allow me to introduce myself, I call myself: AUNTIE CLAUS! I see you've met my helpers, the snow drow. Boys tell them about yourselves."

At the cue from Auntie Claus, the elves sing:

"We are naughty elves
We never clean our plate
We like to tease our sisters
And stay up real late
We never comb our hair

Our clothes are never neat
We don't wash our ears
And you should smell our feet!!"

After thanking the drow for the entertainment, Auntie Claus continues:

"To carry out my plan, I needed some creatures to pull my sleigh. Horses were out, they'd be too noisy landing on the roofs. Wolves are too hard to control, and using reindeer is just plain ridiculous. Then I hit upon the perfect animal—dogs. I sent a party of elves to Dogtown with orders to steal a team of the dogs and to stop anyone they met on the way and steal their gifts. But as luck would have it, the first carriage they came across not only was full of presents, but loaded with dogs, too. I suppose you're here to try to get the presents back. I figured they belonged to someone. I really hate to do this on Wondertime eve, but now that you know my plans, I guess I'm going to have to kill you."

With glazed eyes and a malicious smile, she invites the PCs to step up and get their "presents." She picks up the long willow switch with one hand and reaches into the sack with the other to extract a huge lump of coal. The giant attacks by either hurling lumps of coal or swatting PCs with the willow switch—whichever attack mode is appropriate at the time.

If by chance the PCs offer Auntie Claus a present, tears form in her eyes, and sniffling and snuffling, she sobs, "Gee, no one's ever given me a real present. Now I really feel bad about having to kill you."

Of course, if the giant is given the *Do Not Open 'Till Wondertime Box* (see the gift list) she will really become enraged when it explodes in her face. In this event, she directs her attacks on the giver. Note that the *Snowball From Hades* (see the gift list) will affect the Auntie Claus, as it is actually a fire-based attack.

If the PCs are able to injure the giant to within 10 hp of her death, or if they can do anything to disrupt her obviously unsteady mental state, she suddenly ceases her attacks and curls up into a ball. She cries, "I'm sorry, Mommy! Don't hit me!! Don't hit me!!" Then, with tears streaming down her face and a thumb firmly planted in her mouth she begins humming "Jingle Bells" over and over again. With Auntie Claus reverted back to her childhood and lost in her own madness, the PCs are free to rescue the dogs or search the rest of the buildings. What they do with the giant is up to them, as her mind is now that of a four-year-old's, and she is helpless to resist their attacks.

The pouch attached to the giant's belt is labeled *Whoofle Dust* and is filled with a glistening gold powder. Sprinkling the powder on any animal or object gives it the power of flight for 12 hours. If the dust is sprinkled on the dogs and the sleigh, the PCs will be able to fly back to Ealow in time for the Wondertime eve festivities. The sleigh will easily hold the PCs and the sack of toys for the orphans.

Auntie Claus (Frost Giant): Int Low; AL CE; AC 5; MV 15; HD 14+1-4 hit; hp 65; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA Hurling coal lumps for 2-20 points of damage, switching for 1-10 points of damage and save vs. paralysis or be stunned (−2 on attack and defense due to pain) for 1d4 rounds; SD Impervious to cold; SZ G; ML 11; XP 7,000.

Workshop

This 30′ by 80′ wooden building is the elves' workshop. Two long wooden tables have been set up for the purpose of dismantling and disfiguring toys. The tables are littered with pieces of toys, broken dolls, ripped stuffed animals, sharp pieces of metal, and wooden mallets. Shelves along the wall contain jars of paint in hideous colors, prybars, hammers, skinning knives, chisels, saws, axes, and sacks of toys in various states of disrepair. Most of the toys intended for the orphans can be recovered, as the elves did not have time to do too much dirty work to them before the PCs arrived.

Barracks

This 60′ by 60′ wooden building contains 15 crude cots (the elves sleep in shifts) and a huge moth-eaten bearskin rug. Under the rug is a tunnel leading to the underground ice caves where the snow drow make their home. If the PCs have won the fight against Auntie Claus, the elves try to escape down this hole to their subterranean village. The PCs should be discouraged from following the elves, unless they want to take on hundreds of snow drow in their natural environment.

Epilogue

Thanks to you, the orphans have their toys and Fluffy and her family are reunited for a happy Wondertime celebration. After much licking of noses, the contented canines settle down with their bowls of eggnog to enjoy the festivities.

At a sharp bark from Fluffy, the dogs turn in your direction, salute you with their paws, then slowly push gaily wrapped bones in your direction.

As Penny starts to pound out the notes of a well-known Wondertime tune on the piano, the dogs start to howl along to the melody. You contentedly settle back and think to yourself, "This has been the Fluffiest Wondertime ever."

A DM's Guide To Gift Giving

Although Mayor Penny gave the PCs Wondertime presents at the beginning of the adventure, the PCs do not know what the presents do. The following provides that information—which is for the DM only. The PCs can discover the magical properties of the gifts as they go along.

Wondertime Gifts For PC #1:

1. A small, heavy package containing a ¼ slice of fruit cake. The label reads *fruit cake of the gods.* Eating the entire piece of *fruit cake* causes a dead or near dead creature to be restored to full life and hit points. The cake can be stuffed in a dead creature's mouth with the same effect as eating it.

2. A scroll with the following spell: *Gift of warding* (Abjuration, Evocation) Sphere: Guardian; Components: V, S, M; Range: Touch; Casting Time: Special; Duration: Permanent until discharged; Area of Effect: Special; Saving Throw: Special.

To use this spell, an object of any size must be chosen and wrapped in colorful paper. A small paper tag stating the name of the intended recipient of the gift must be affixed to it. Once the spell is cast, anyone attempting to open the gift (other than the named individual) must save vs. spells or receive 3d4 points of electrical shock damage. A successful save vs. spells reduces damage by half. In addition, a *magic mouth* appears on the gift, informing the violator that he's being "naughty, not nice."

3. A scroll with the following spell: *Holly word* (Enchantment/Charm) Sphere: Animal; Components: V, S; Range: 60-yards; Casting Time: Special; Duration: 24 hours; Saving Throw: Special; Area of Effect: One intelligent creature.

The recipient of a *holly word* spell must save vs. spells or find himself overwhelmed with holiday spirit. The effects include singing carols, bestowing glad tidings, and stopping any current activity to rush out and shop for presents. The recipient is overcome by an urgent desire to spend the holidays with the family. If a save vs. spells succeeds, the recipient instead experiences a strong craving for eggnog and plum pudding. This spell only effects an intelligent creature whose hit dice are equal to or less than the level of the caster.

4. A scroll with the following spell: *Silent night 15' radius* (Alteration) Sphere: Guardian; Components: V, S; Range: 100 yards; Casting Time: Special; Duration: 1 round/level; Saving Throw: None; Area of Effect: 15' radius sphere.

When this spell is cast, complete silence and darkness prevail within the affected area. While the spell is in effect, no noise or light can enter or exit. The spell is stationary, unless cast upon a moving creature or object. In this case, the effect moves with the target.

Wondertime Gifts For PC #2

1. A small glass bottle of very strong-smelling cologne labeled *cheap cologne of protection.* Anyone splashing himself with a dose of the cologne lowers his Armor Class by 1 for a period of 24 hours. If the entire bottle is used, the Armor Class is reduced by 2 for the same period. There are two doses in the bottle.

2. A scroll with the following spell: *Magic mistletoe* (Enchantment/Charm) Range: 0; Components: V, S; Duration: 1 round/level; Casting Time: Special; Area of Effect: Intelligent creatures; Saving Throw: Special.

Casting this spell causes a small sprig of mistletoe to appear, suspended in air, above the caster's head. Any intelligent creature viewing the effect of this spell must immediately save vs. spell or be overcome with a desire to plant a big, sloppy kiss on the caster's mouth. If a save vs. spell succeeds, the creature will only deliver a small peck on the cheek.

3. A wide tie with a purple, pink and lime-green swirling pattern. Label inside reads *loud tie of chameleon power.* Wearing the *tie* allows the user to blend in with his surroundings, if he so chooses, with a 90% chance of success. If the attempt is successful, the wearer will not be noticed unless he moves, in which case he will be detected as a blur of colors.

4. A white leather sling engraved with words *sling of super snowballs.* The *sling* acts as a normal sling for stones and bullets. However, any snowballs shot from the *sling* turn super cold, doing 1d6 points of damage to any creature struck.

Wondertime Gifts For PC #3

1.A pair of knee-length white boxer shorts decorated with images of evergreen trees and snowmen. The label inside the shorts reads "*underwear of giant strength*—must be worn on the outside of clothing—hand wash on smooth rocks only." This *underwear,* if used as per the directions, increases the wearer's Strength to 19, giving him bonuses of +3 to hit and +7 to damage.

2. Stuffed rag doll with blond hair. Doll says "Mama" when picked up. This item is not magical. It was accidentally mixed in with the other presents.

3. A glass bottle filled with creamy eggnog. The label on bottle reads *eggnog of extra healing.* When drunk, the eggnog will restore 2d8+1 hit points of damage. If half the bottle is drunk, 1d4+1 hit points will be restored.

4. A small glass globe filled with water and containing a small figurine of a snowman. There is a layer of artificial snow on the bottom of the globe. Inscribed on the base are the words "shake me to wake me." The globe can be used up to three times within a 24-hour period. Shaking the globe causes the snow to swirl around the figurine and a 6' tall snowman to appear in front of the user. As long as the user remains within 6' of the snowman, all physical and magical attacks directed at him will be absorbed by the snowman. The user can still attack normally. The snowman is AC 4, has 24 hit points and saves as a 4th level wizard. Once the snowman has taken damage equal to or greater than its hit points, it melts and reappears in the globe. In all other respects the snowman is treated as a normal man of snow with a weight of approximately 180 lbs. It is not capable of movement.

Wondertime Gifts PC #4

1. Set of 12 white-metal throwing stars shaped like snowflakes. When thrown, these razor-sharp snowflakes do 1d6+1 points of damage to anything they hit.

2. A large empty velvet sack decorated with green holly designs. Printed on the sack in bright green letters is "Toys For Good Girls And Boys." Any object placed within the sack will seem to disappear, as the sack will gain neither weight nor bulkiness. Items placed within the sack may be removed at any time. This special *bag of holding* will carry up to 1,000 lbs. of items.

3. A red woolen cap with earflaps. The label inside the cap reads *cap of cold protection.* When this *cap* is worn with the ear flaps down, the wearer can withstand extremely cold temperatures, whether natural or magical, without suffering any ill effects. The wearer takes half damage from magical cold attacks, or none if his save succeeds.

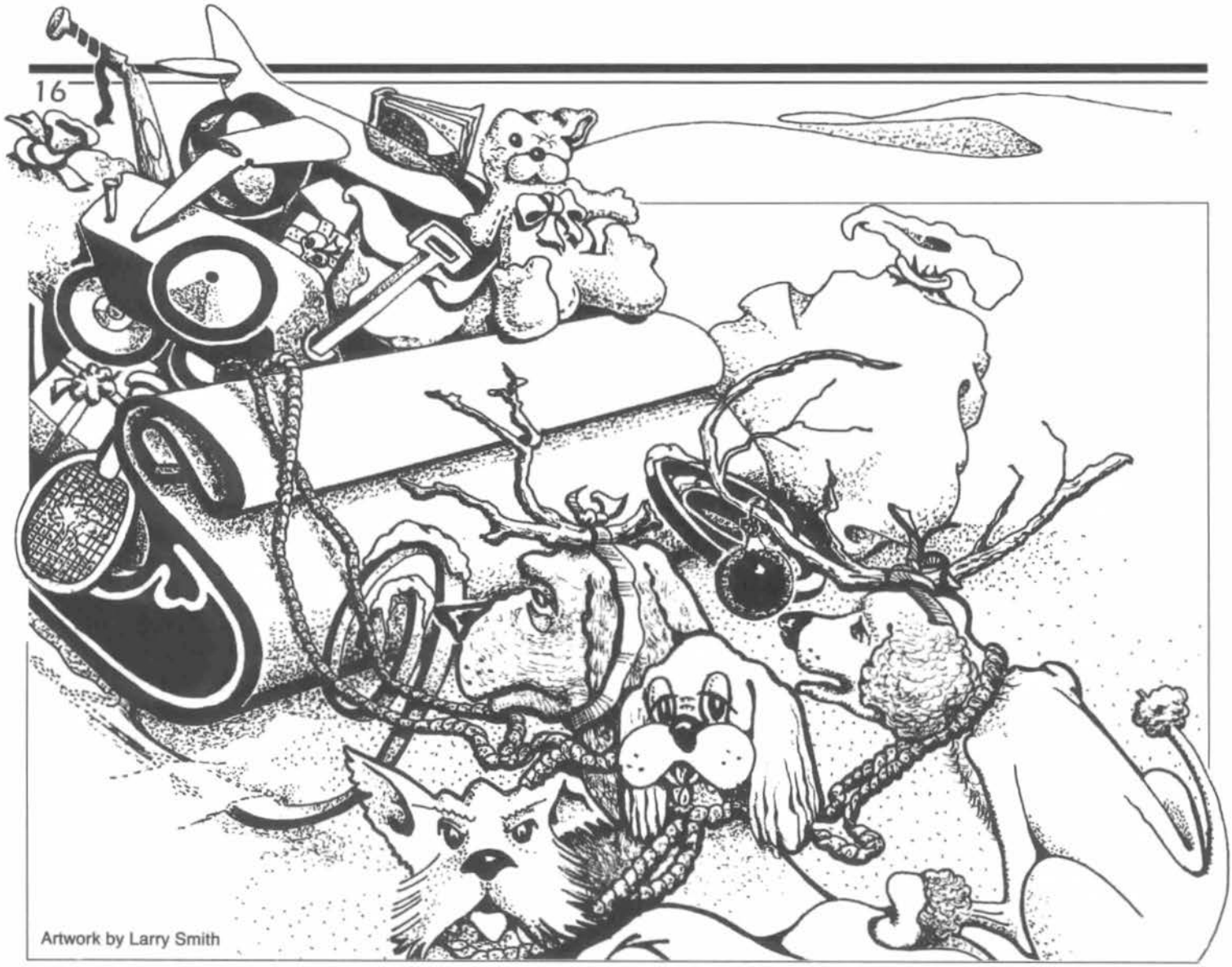
4. A pair of black rubber boots with thick metal buckles. Inside the boots is a label reading *boots of snow striding.* Engraved on the soles of the boots are candy canes and gumdrops. The wearer of these *boots* is able to walk on top of any depth of snow or thickness of ice without slipping or falling through. Movement rate is normal in other respects, although running is hindered because of the bulkiness of the *boots.*

Wondertime Gifts For PC #5

1. The label on this long red and green plaid scarf with tassels on the ends reads *scarf of protection.* Anyone wearing this scarf lowers his or her Armor Class by 1 and can keep his or her neck warm.

2. A long, translucent icicle-shaped wand. The runes inscribed on the wand read *wand of frosty*—command word is "chillout." Pointing this *wand* at a target up to 60' away and speaking the command word causes a blast of snow to erupt from the end of the *wand* burying the target creature in a pile of snow (1d4 rounds to dig out) and doing 2d6 cold damage. There are six charges.

3. Covered ceramic pot filled with warm figgy pudding. The label reads *pudding of scrying.* This pudding may be used once per day as a scrying device. The user must gaze into the pudding and form a mental image of the subject to be located. The user must have some personal knowledge of the



Artwork by Larry Smith

subject to be located, with the chance of locating the same as that of a *crystal ball* (DMG pg. 164). If the scrying is successful, a hazy image of the subject will form on the surface of the pudding for a period of 30 seconds. Note that the pudding will not reveal the whereabouts or any other information on the subject, but will only reveal the condition and immediate surroundings of the subject at that point in time.

4. A sack of assorted hard candies. Label on sack reads "*Candi of the Magi*—Eat Me." Once a single piece of candy is eaten, the consumer will be seized with an overwhelming desire to devour the entire sack (save vs. spells to resist—if the individual is trying to resist). The eater then experiences a strong sugar rush, a feeling of power and gains a permanent level (DM should then secretly roll for additional hit points and add them to the character statistics). If a save is desired and is successful, the magic is nullified and the candy is then treated as a normal sack of sugary treats.

Wondertime Gifts For PC #6

1. A glass case containing a single snowball. The snowball seems to glow with a red light from within. The label on the case reads "Caution—*The Snowball in Hades.* This item can only be used once. After the glass case is broken, the snowball can be thrown up to 10 yards, with a normal "to hit" roll needed for success. Upon hitting the target, the snowball erupts in a ball of fire doing 6d6 points of damage to any creatures within 10′ of the point of impact. If a successful saving throw is made, the damage is halved.

2. A long red and white striped stocking with a lump in the toe. Stitched on the stocking are the words *everfull stocking.* The *stocking* always contains one random item which is determined by rolling 1d6 and consulting the chart below.

1—Orange	4—Lump of Coal
2—Bag of Gumdrops	5—Apple
3—Sack of Chestnuts	6—Rock

Once an item is removed, another immediately appears in the toe. The stocking continues generating gifts for the entire holiday season.

3. A small, square box wrapped in festive paper and tied with a bright red ribbon. A large tag on the box reads "Do NOT Open 'Til Wondertime." If opened early, the contents of the box explodes, doing 2d6 points of damage and charring the upper body of the impatient opener. If the box is opened Wondertime day, it reveals a beautiful diamond nose ring valued at 400 gp.

4. A pair of red mittens tied together with a three-foot-long string. A tag on the string reads *mittens of ogre power.* When worn, these mittens add bonuses of +3 to hit and +6 to damage to any attacks with the hands or with a hurled or held weapon. The mittens must remain attached to be effective. Because of the string, the use of two hands while wearing the mittens is severely limited. ❑

The 1993 Games Decathlon

A Year-Long Contest for Network Clubs

The fourth annual Games Decathlon is about to begin. Each year, the Network offers all registered clubs a chance to compete in a series of 10 events which challenge each club's gaming skill, creativity, and team work.

As this is being written, the 1992 Decathlon is drawing to a close, with a four-way horse race. Two-time defending champion ARC Fellowship is being hotly pursued by SAIGE (which has been the points leader through most of the year), and by several other clubs. If you want to get in on all the excitement, organize your own Network club. Club membership forms are available from Network HQ. Network clubs also enjoy special offers, discounts, free memberships on computer networks, and their own exclusive tournaments at GEN CON® Game Fair, Winter Fantasy™, and others—which are not part of the Decathlon.

The events that make up each Decathlon are chosen by the Members' Advisory Committee. The events in the 1993 Decathlon fall into three categories; clubs can choose any 10 events from the three categories below. There is a limit to the number of events a club can enter in each category. Only the first 10 Decathlon events a club officially enters count toward the club's total—win or lose.

Convention Tournaments

Rules: Each club can select up to four events from the following list to count toward their 1993 Decathlon effort. To select a tournament, a club officer must designate a club member to represent the club at the event by sending Network HQ a *Decathlon entry form* (or a legible facsimile) postmarked by the deadline listed below. (Each club was mailed a sample form this past fall. Additional forms are available by sending a SASE to Network HQ.) At the tournament, the representative must write "1993 Decathlon" and the club name in the upper right hand corner of his or her voting sheet. *Failure to do so disqualifies the club.*

Points: If the club member designated on the form wins first place in the tournament, his or her club receives 3 Decathlon points. If the designee finishes second, the club receives 1 point. Note that it is possible for more than one club to earn points at a single tournament.

Convention/Event	Deadline
Winter Fantasy, Jan., WI	
AD&D® game Benefit	Dec. 17
Pandemonium, Jan., Ontario Canada	
AD&D game Feature	Dec. 17
CANCON, Jan., Canberra, Australia	
AD&D game Feature	Dec. 17
Nameless, Jan., London, England	
AD&D game Benefit	Dec. 17
Warpcon, Jan. Ireland	
AD&D game Feature	Dec. 17
Kapcon, Jan., Wellington, New Zealand	
AD&D game Feature	Dec. 17
Total Confusion, Feb., Marlbough, MA	
AD&D game	Jan. 20
Wimblecon, Feb., Wimbleton, England	
AD&D game Feature	Jan. 20
Orecon, Feb., Los Angeles, CA	
XXVc™ game	Jan. 20
ConnCon, March, Danbury, CT	
AD&D Members Only	Feb 16
Magnum Opus Con, Mar., Greenville, SC	
SPELLJAMMER® game	Feb. 16
Games Fair, April, London, England	
AD&D game	March 16
Pointcon, April, West Point, NY	
AD&D game	March 16
Eclipse '93, May, Columbia, MO	
GAMMA WORLD® game	Apr. 19
Briscon, May, Queensland, Australia	
AD&D game Feature	Apr. 19
Origins '93, July, Fort Worth, TX	
DARK SUN™ game	June 15
Dragon Con, July, Atlanta, GA	
AD&D game	June 15
Alohacon, July, Honolulu, HI	
RAVENLOFT® game	June 15
QUINCON, July, Quincy, IL	
DRAGONLANCE® game	June 15
Arcanacon, July, Melbourne, Australia	
AD&D game	June 15
GEN CON® Game Fair, Aug., WI	
AD&D game Benefit	July 20
AndCon, Sep., Independence, OH	
AD&D game Benefit	Aug. 10
Fall Con, Oct., Lincoln, NE	
SPELLJAMMER game	Sep. 21
CosCon, October, Beaver Falls, PA	
AD&D game Benefit	June 15
Totally Tubular Con, Oct., Los Angles, CA	
Living City event	Sep. 21
European GEN CON Game Fair, Nov., England	
AD&D game Open	Oct. 19
Fall Game Fair, Nov., Honolulu, HI	
SPELLJAMMER game	Oct. 19
ShaunCon, Nov., Kansas City, MO	
GAMMA WORLD game	Oct. 19

Writing Events

Enter up to six of these events. Except for the *Black and White Art* event, entries must be typed or computer printed, double-spaced, on white, 8½" by 11" paper with a one-inch margin all around. If you use a computer, please indicate on the entry what type of computer you use. The author's name and the club name should appear at the top of each page, and each page must be numbered. Clubs can submit entries for each event as many times as they wish. However, all entries must come with a separate *standard disclosure form.* Except for the *Black and White Art* and *Tournament Design* events, all entries must come in the same envelope. Each entry or group of entries must be accompanied by one *Decathlon entry form* which lists all the items the club is entering. A club can earn Decathlon points for only one entry in each contest. Special rules applying to each contest are listed below:

Single Character: Create an NPC hero or PC for the GAMMA WORLD, AD&D, D&D®, or AMAZING ENGINE™ game. Include a basic description of the character's appearance, history, skills, and equipment. Entries cannot exceed five pages.
Deadline: Entries must be postmarked by February 1st.
Points: First place, 3 points; second place, 2 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.

Item: Create a magical or technological item for the GAMMA WORLD, AD&D, D&D, or AMAZING ENGINE game. Tell us what the item does, what it looks like, and who can use it. Entries cannot exceed three pages.
Deadline: Entries must be postmarked by March 1st.
Points: First place, 3 points; second place, 2 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.

Villain: Create a nasty NPC for the GAMMA WORLD, AD&D, D&D, or AMAZING ENGINE game. Include a basic description of the character's appearance, history, skills, equipment, and usual mode of operation. Entries cannot exceed six pages.
Deadline: Entries must be postmarked by April 5th.
Points: First place, 3 points; second

place, 2 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.

Living City Encounter: Create a single encounter for the Network's Living City setting. The encounter need not involve combat, or even danger, but it should be something to hold a PC's attention. The creature at the heart of the encounter can be a personality already published in a Living City product or it can be original. *Do not* create a new monster for your encounter. Entries should not exceed four pages.
Deadline: Entries must be postmarked by May 2nd.
Points: First place, 3 points; second place, 2 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.

Short Story: Write a short piece of fiction with a theme appropriate to any popular gaming genre. You are free to use characters from your own previous Decathlon submissions or from Living City products, but the story itself must be original. Entries should not exceed 12 pages.
Deadline: Entries must be postmarked by July 5th.
Points: First place, 3 points; second place, 2 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.

Black and White Art: Create a piece of black and white art with a theme appropriate to any popular gaming genre. You are free to use characters from your own previous Decathlon submissions or from Living City products, but the scene itself must be original. Entries should be no smaller than 4" square and no larger than 12" square. Any medium is acceptable. Only original works will be acceptable: slides, photocopies, prints and the like do not qualify.
Deadline: Entries must be postmarked by September 6th.
Points: First place, 3 points; second place, 2 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.

One-Round AD&D game Tournament: Create a one-round tournament for the AD&D game—plus six characters. The tournament must consist of six to eight well-developed encounters. Tournament writing guidelines are available from Network HQ. The tournament cannot exceed 30 pages, including maps.

Clubs may submit tournaments any time before the deadline, but each tournament must include a cover letter identifying it as a Decathlon entry. Further, clubs also must submit a complete list of all tournaments which the club wishes to claim as Decathlon submissions; the list should be postmarked between September 15th and October 4th. Clubs can submit lists earlier, but only at their own risk. This additional requirement will help HQ make sure everybody gets credit for all their tournaments.
Deadline: Entries and lists must be postmarked by October 4th.
Points: First place, 6 points; second place, 4 points; third place 3 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.
In addition, we will run the winning tournament at the GEN CON Game Fair or another large convention. And the winning authors will receive a plaque.

Multi-Round AD&D game Tournament: Create a two- or three-round tournament for the AD&D game—plus six characters. Each round must consist of six to eight well-developed encounters. Tournament writing guidelines are available from Network HQ. A round cannot exceed 30 pages, including maps.

Clubs may submit tournaments any time before the deadline, but each tournament must include a cover letter identifying it as a Decathlon entry. Further, clubs also must submit a complete list of all tournaments which the club wishes to claim as Decathlon submissions; the list should be postmarked between October 15th and November 1st.
Deadline: Entries and lists must be postmarked by November 1st.
Points: First place, 8 points; second place, 6 points; third place 4 points; entering, but not placing, 1 point.
In addition, we will run the winning tournament at the GEN CON Game Fair or another large convention. And the winning authors will receive a plaque.

Service Events

A club can enter up to two of the following events:

Most Sanctioned Tournaments: Any tournament submitted to Network HQ between January 1st and November 2nd can qualify *if the HQ staff sanctions it for play.* Each round counts toward the club's total. Each tournament must include a cover letter identifying it as a Decathlon service event entry; tournaments submitted for the two tournament writing events can count toward the total for this event. Each club should submit a written list of all tournaments it is claiming for this event between November 1st and November 15th.
Points: First place, 6 points; second place, 4 points; third place 2 points.

Most New Members Recruited: New members recruited between February 1st and October 31st can qualify. The club name must be legibly written in ink in the top margin of the membership form. *Clubs should not collect forms or membership fees;* the new member should submit the form normally. Only new memberships qualify—renewals do not.
Points: First place, 8 points; second place, 4 points; third place 2 points.

Winning/Prizes

There are two categories of competition this year. The ***General Category*** is open to all Network clubs. A club is automatically registered for this category when it submits a *Decathlon Entry Form* for any Decathlon event. The ***Collegiate Category*** is open to any Network club that is recognized as a student organization by an accredited college or university. To register for this category, the club should include with its first Decathlon entry a letter on school letterhead from its faculty advisor, registrar's office, or other school administration or academic department. The letter should include the club name, and a statement confirming the club's status as an official student organization. Student clubs competing in the ***Collegiate Category*** also qualify for the ***General Category*** and are assumed to compete in both categories simultaneously.

The maximum possible club score in the 1993 Decathlon is 44. The club with the highest score at the end of the year wins the ***General Category***. The student club with the highest score compared to all other student clubs at the end of the year wins the ***Collegiate Category***.

The winning club in each category will receive a trophy, a $100.00 gift certificate to the Mail Order Hobby Shop, a one-year Network membership to assign as it sees fit, and bragging rights for about a year. The second place club will receive a $75.00 gift certificate, a one-year Network membership, and the respect and admiration of most other official clubs. The third place club will receive a $50.00 gift certificate, a one-year Network membership, and the satisfaction that comes from knowing they hung in there with the big boys.

A single club can win only one prize; if a club qualifies for prizes in each category, the highest-ranking prize will be awarded and the other prizes will awarded to the remaining clubs in the category. Network HQ reserves the right to award additional prizes for outstanding or unusual performances over the course of the year.

The Living City

Arts' Haven

by Randall Lemon

Arts' Haven is a two-story brownstone in Uptown Ravens Bluff, just across from Crow's End. Its unusual feature is a copper-colored shingle roof with two skylights. There are two entrances to the first floor. A sturdy wooden staircase leads from the side of the building to an entrance on the second floor.

Arts' Haven is actually a nickname given to the building by its three owners. A beautifully carved and painted sign hanging from a wrought iron holder on the corner of the building announces to all prospective customers that Arts' Haven contains the following businesses:

Brond Carlow's Harmony of Heaven Music Store
The Poet's Corner: Verse for all Occasions, Bartleby Quilling, Prop.
'Portant Portraits

Brond's store is the most intricate of the three, consisting of a showroom with a counter and a rack of sheet music. Brond scribes the sheet music from songs he composes and other songs he has heard over the years. The showroom walls are covered with several exquisitely carved and painted mandolins and lutes that hang from wooden pegs. There are also a variety of harps and lyres carefully resting on polished wood shelves. Brond keeps all of the instruments precisely tuned.

Beneath the counter, Brond has three drawers (one of them secret). The normal drawers contain extra strings, picks, and carrying straps for musical instruments. All these items, except for some very rare instruments displayed on the walls, are for sale at competitive prices.

The secret drawer in the counter is a "dummy" drawer where Brond keeps a small amount of coins for thieves who might break in seeking his wealth.

At each end of the counter are stout wooden doors. One leads to a room half the size of the showroom. This is Brond's workshop, and it contains a massive work table, a couple of wooden stools, a variety of woodworking tools, and a number of large pieces of fairly expensive wood. Brond keeps most of his money (usually about 1,000 gp) and his *pick of propitiousness* in a secret hollow inside the work table. This compartment can be found and opened only by crawling under the table. Brond's friend Bartleby has trapped and locked this secret hiding place with a series of hidden studs. Pressing the wrong combination of studs releases a cloud of gas that causes the victim to save vs. poison −4 or fall asleep for 2d12 minutes. The character can be awakened sooner. No matter when the victim recovers, he suffers from weakness (all ability scores reduced by half and half movement) for 1d3 days or until he receives a *neutralize poison* spell. This trap cannot be removed, but a thief can avoid releasing the gas with a successful remove traps roll at −10%. Finding the right combination to open the compartment requires an open locks roll at −20%.

The door at the opposite end of the counter is a small closet which is usually locked. Brond keeps a few of his most elegantly crafted instruments and his *harp of healing* here.

The rest of the first floor consists of Bartleby's shop, which looks more like a comfortable sitting room than a place of business. Bartleby's store is dominated by a fireplace that takes up most of one wall. In front of the fireplace is a beautiful woven carpet incorporating many shades of blue and cloudscapes.

Bartleby's room also has four wingback chairs pulled up close to the fireplace, each with a cloth throw rug over it to protect the fabric. Most people believe that the carpet on the floor is the famed *flying carpet* of many of Bartleby's tales. Actually, Bartleby commissioned the carpet in a faraway town and brought it here so people would believe precisely that. The real *flying carpet* is a drab brown throw rug that sits on the wingback chair usually occupied by Ambrose Pislewaite. The rest of Bartleby's treasure, mostly consisting of gems (currently about 8,000 gp worth in assorted sizes) has been cleverly hidden in a stone safe disguised to look like a partially-burned log. It has been fireproofed and sits in the fireplace among the real burning logs.

Bartleby's writing desk has a very high stool pulled up to it. It is usually covered with a plethora of papers, quills, and ink pots. Some of the sheets of paper are blank, but the majority have bits and pieces of unfinished stories, poems, and plays on them. Bartleby actually composed some of these from scratch, but he is not above borrowing and embellishing on someone else's story and then attaching his name to the new, improved version.

Bartleby's room also contains many book shelves which hold a vast number of books of various shapes and colors. Most of these books have dramatic and glorious titles imprinted in golf leaf on the bindings. Numerous books also have Bartleby's name etched in gold leaf as the author (many of these also sport a blackened area just above where presumably the "real" author's name was before Bartleby used burnt cork to blacken it out). A blue haze, from the fireplace and Bartleby's pipeweed smoking, perpetually hangs in the air near the ceiling.

The second floor is a single room. One end contains three beds and a small kitchenette with a table, four chairs, and cabinets filled with cutlery, plates, mugs, and food. There are also three small wardrobes.

The rest of the room is fairly empty and serves as the studio for Ambrose Pislewaite's *'Portant Portraits.* Two large easels dominate the area; each sits directly beneath a skylight. Both have a small table and short stool pulled up to them. The tables are covered with a generous selection of artist supplies. There are also a few tall stools and comfortable chairs used by the subjects of Ambrose's portraits. One corner of the studio is a jumble of wooden frameworks and bolts of various colored cloth (used as backgrounds). A pile of phony but heroic looking props, such as gilded but useless swords, pieces of armor, and flimsy shields lie nearby.

There is also a small curtained off dressing area with a full-sized mirror.

Needless to say, the studio walls are covered with paintings. Though the majority of Ambrose's patrons come to him for portraits, his personal collection is actually dominated by scenes of Ravens Bluff. There are paintings of buildings, sections of the city at day and night, and views of street children playing games. There are also portraits; one

each of Bartleby, Brond, and Ambrose, and one of a hauntingly beautiful woman with very short black hair and piercing black eyes. She is petite and stands against a background of swirling midnight blue and black doted with motes of silver and gold. This portrait is a sample of Ambrose's work at its very best. It has an alluring quality (non-magical) that invariably draws anyone who visits the studio over to it. The final portrait in the studio is Ambrose's showpiece. It is a duplicate of a portrait Ambrose did for Lord Marshall Gaius Varro, perhaps the most recognizable man in the city (see *Gateway to Ravens Bluff, The Living City*). Ambrose uses this piece to assure prospective customers of his skills in capturing a customer's true likeness.

While Ambrose has no real interest in money, he keeps his valuables in the kitchenette's cutlery drawer (behind a false back). Currently, there is about 2,400 gp in assorted coins and gems and two full jars of *Nolzur's marvelous pigments.*

Brond Carlow

8th level Human Male Bard

STR: 10
INT: 16
WIS: 10
DEX: 15
CON: 14
CHA: 18

AC Normal: 8
AC Rear: 9
Hit Points: 29
Alignment: Neutral Good
Languages: Common, Thorass, Halfling
Age: 43
Height: 5' 8"
Weight: 151 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Silver/Blue

Weapon Proficiencies: Long bow, short sword, dirk
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Singing (18), musical instrument (harp, lyre) (15), read/write Common (17), musical instrument making (15)
Magic Items: *Cloak of protection +1, harp of healing*†, pick of propitiousness*
Spells/day: 3 3 1

†Item from *The Complete Bard's Handbook*
* New item described at the end of this article

Spell Books:
Level One: *Color spray, jump, light, Nystal's magical aura, read magic;* Level Two: *ESP, pyrotechnics, ray of enfeeblement, web;* Level Three: *Dispel magic, fireball, illusionary script*

Brond's silver locks are shoulder length, and his eyes twinkle.

Brond began his adventuring career with a group called The Company of the Bright Blade. He traveled with them for almost eight years until the famous disaster at Cutrock in the Giant Spire Mountains nearly wiped them out. This incident is the subject of one of Carlow's most famous ballads, *Cut Down at Cutrock.*

After the surviving members of the company returned to the relative safety of Helmsdale, they went their separate ways.

During this time, Brond met his future adventuring companion Bartleby Quilling. The two became fast friends and moved on seeking adventure (little did they know that just two years later with the rise of the Witch-King, there would be adventure aplenty right there). From there, the two traveled due west, eventually meeting Ambrose and Felicia Harpsinger, a mage. The foursome traveled together for some time and called themselves The Four Winds Adventuring Band.

Brond found in Felicia inspiration for many of his most romantic ballads. He was, in truth, quite attracted to her, even though he considered himself a bit too old for her. This and Ambrose's obvious admiration for Felicia made Brond stay at arms-length from her; he often regretted that decision. The band broke up when Felicia tragically disappeared.

Bartleby Quilling

9th Level Male Halfling Thief

STR: 10
INT: 13
WIS: 10
DEX: 16
CON: 10
CHA: 15

AC Normal: 7
AC Rear: 9
Hit Points: 30
Alignment: Neutral Good
Languages: Common, Thorass, Halfling
Age: 50
Height: 3'
Weight: 70 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Hazel

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, sling, short sword, hand axe
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Fast-talking (15), local history (16), read/write Common (14), artistic ability, poetry (11)
Magic Items: *Ring of protection +1, carpet of flying* (four passengers)

Thief Skills

PP	OL	FT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL
86	86	76	35	35	35	64	63

At an early age Bartleby ran away from the halfling community where he was born and traveled to Bloodstone Village. There, he ran with various street gangs for a number of years until one day he tried to pick the wrong pocket. That pocket belonged to Celedon Kierney, an experienced and alert adventurer.

After serving a short term in the town jail, Bartleby was released into Celedon's custody. Celedon had been amused by the outlandish tale Bartleby told to explain how his hand had ended up in Celedon's pocket. The halfling claimed he had been tossing chestnuts into the air and trying to catch them in his mouth. When his very last chestnut missed its mark and fell into Celedon's pocket, it was only natural that he tried to retrieve it.

Celedon decided to rehabilitate the young thief, and though this efforts were never completely successful, the pair soon became good friends. Bartleby traveled with Celedon for eight years before meeting Brond Carlow. The halfling quickly became enamored with the idea of striking it rich as a brave adventurer and left with Brond.

Sometime later, Bartleby and Brond encountered Ambrose and Felicia, and the four formed their own adventuring company. Felicia treated Bartleby with great respect and affection, and Bartleby was quite sure that this beautiful human had a secret crush on him. Bartleby might have considered courting her if their heights had not been so mismatched. Bartleby mourns Felicia's loss as a friend, and her apparent demise has brought him to the realization that he no longer has the heart for adventuring.

Bartleby has always possessed a gift with riddles and verse. He won numerous writing contests in the Vast, and therefore considers himself quite the scholar. His ego has now grown as large as his belly, and, if asked, he will proudly proclaim himself the greatest

writer in Faerun. He does have a splendid imagination and good speaking voice, which combine to make him an enthralling storyteller.

Ambrose "Bonecrusher" Pislewaite

6th Level Male Human Fighter

STR: 18/40
INT: 16
WIS: 15
DEX: 17
CON: 14
CHA: 10

AC Normal: 7
AC Rear: 10
Hit Points: 41
Alignment: Chaotic Good
Languages: Common
Age: 28
Height: 6′ 8″
Weight: 285 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Black/Blue

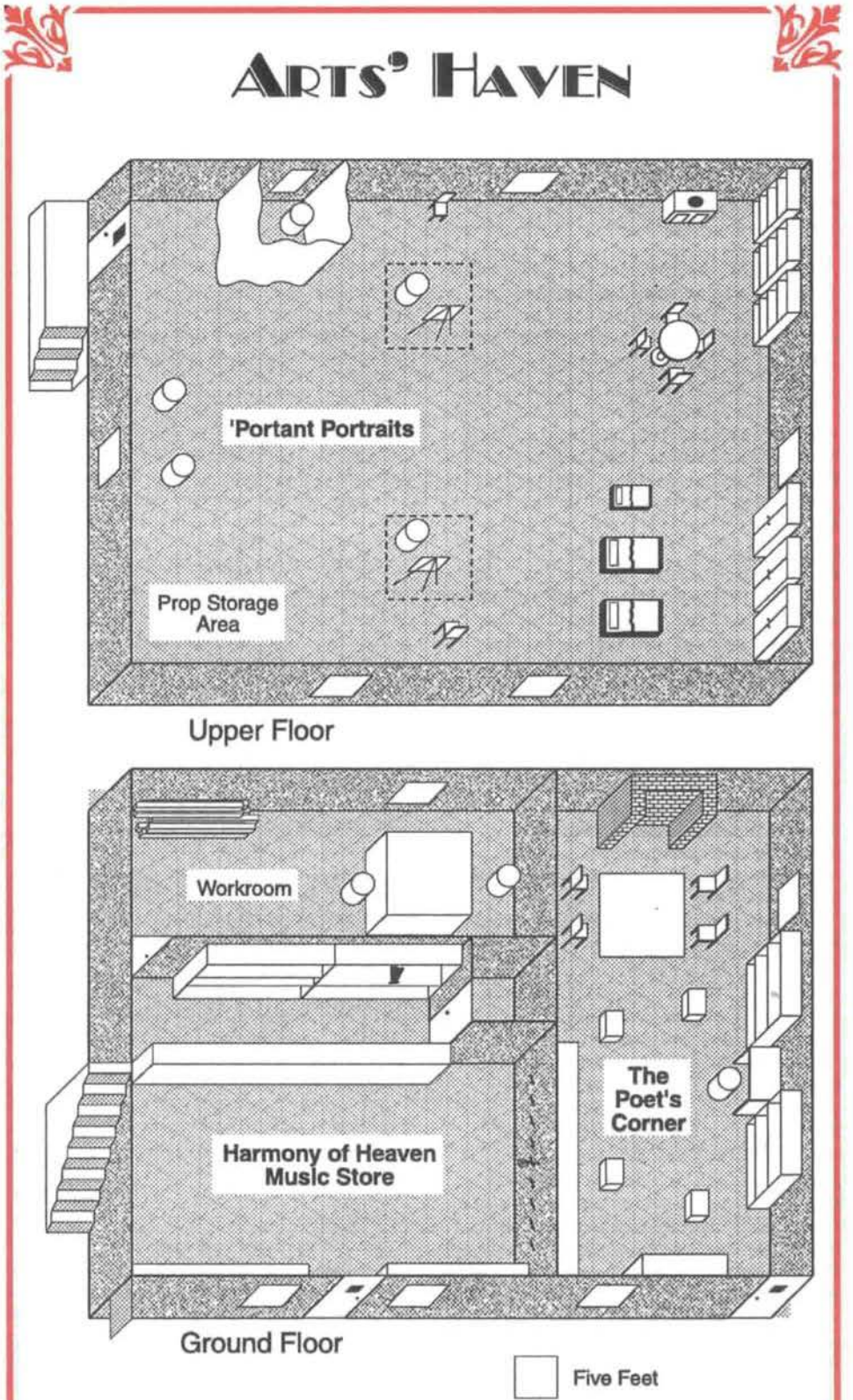
Weapon Proficiencies: Crossbow, two-handed sword, mace, flail, long sword
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Wood carving (17), Artistic ability, painting (16), hunting (14)

Ambrose Pislewaite is a giant of a man. He wears his hair in an unruly mop, and his eyes are watery.

When Ambrose was quite young, he was apprenticed by his poor father to a sign painter and wood carver. Ambrose's new master was extremely talented in his profession, but he never had children of his own, and Ambrose was his first apprentice. While he was not a cruel man, neither was he a very patient one, and he often treated Ambrose as a clumsy servant who had just broken the crockery.

As a youth, Ambrose was an undersized runt. This, combined with his name, made him the target of every young bully in town. More often than not, Ambrose would return from every errand his master sent him on with a bloody nose or black eye. In fact, his master probably would have gotten rid of him, not wanting to be troubled with the youngster's constant aches and pains. However, Ambrose showed an uncanny skill in lettering and painting signs. Though his master would never admit it, within six years of his being apprenticed to the sign maker it was Ambrose who was the true master in terms of artistic skill.

As time went by, Ambrose began to



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grow. Soon, it seemed the young bullies no longer found his name so objectionable. Those who did found they had black eyes and bruises. Loading and unloading lumber for his master's signs had toned the young giant, and though he detested fighting, he found it more satisfying to beat young toughs into a bloody pulps than to put up with their taunts.

Now Ambrose began to be bothered by a new type of antagonist: the young man (often drunk) trying to prove just how much of a man he was. These constant confrontations might have driven Ambrose insane except to for two things: the peace and serenity he found when painting the more intricate signs his master was commissioned to do, and Felicia Harpsinger. Felicia moved to town when Ambrose was 14. She had come with her master, an old wizard named Apothac. Felicia was already 19, and young Ambrose idolized her at first sight. He was too scared to speak to her for two years, believing her to be the most beautiful girl in the world. But one night, quite by accident, Ambrose found himself passing an alley from which came the sounds of a struggle. Investigating further, he saw three drunks harassing Felicia. Everything went red for Ambrose; he howled in rage and charged the three burly drunks. When the dust cleared, one man had two broken arms, another had a broken leg and a concussion, and the third was dead, his spine snapped.

While Felicia was grateful, Ambrose's happiness at saving her was short lived. The dead man was the son of one of the members of the town council. Felicia fled with Ambrose rather than see him unjustly hung for murder.

The two young people found the wilderness harsh and had to fight to survive. Eventually they joined a group of more experienced adventurers, and Ambrose improved in weapon skills. Unfortunately, they had to part company with their comrades one night when the very fighter who had taken Ambrose under his wing made advances toward Felicia. Ambrose killed him in yet another rage.

Shortly thereafter, Ambrose and Felicia met Brond and Bartleby, and the Four Winds Company was formed. Ambrose was never able to tell Felicia his feelings toward her, though he was sure she must have known. He hoped she felt the same toward him.

Ambrose is certain Felicia sacrificed herself to save him, and her loss left him completely disconsolate and unable to continue as an adventurer.

Opening For Business

Brond, Bartleby, and Ambrose have never told anyone the full story of their last adventure with Felicia. After that tragic event, however, none of the three survivors wanted to continue adventuring. Ambrose was devastated, and so it was up to Brond and Bartleby to decide on their course of action. The group had a fair amount of wealth, and they thought a change of scenery was in order.

The three friends moved to Ravens Bluff and bought the brownstone now known as Art's Haven, and both Brond and Bartleby opened their stores. Though Brond had very little stock initially, his store was an almost immediate success. Bartleby's "store," on the other hand has never been a commercial success; it is however, a big hit with the local kids. Numbers of them often turn up in Bartleby's to listen to the tall tales the halfling spins. Many of the youngsters also drop in at Brond's to hear him strum his ballads.

During his first few months in Ravens Bluff Ambrose did nothing but sit and mope. However, time heals all wounds—even the deepest. Gradually Ambrose resumed his old form of therapy for stressful situations; he began to paint. The emotional upheaval he had gone through because of Felicia's loss prompted him to plum new depths of his own soul, and this search expressed itself in his art.

Ambrose had no intention of selling his paintings, but Bartleby and Brond were genuinely moved by his skill and saw his work as yet another way to make him forget the past. They encouraged him to begin painting for a living. At first people found it incredible that this hulking brute could be the soulful artist his friends claimed he was, but now a portrait by Ambrose commands many gold.

Ambrose tends to be moody and passive and often turns down the opportunity to paint a particular subject. This has not added to his popularity. However, no one can deny his ability, and he is indisputably the best artist in Ravens Bluff.

The three friends seldom go out evenings (Bartleby being the sole exception). When not at work or upstairs asleep, they invariably can be found in Bartleby's sitting room. Each has own chair, and the fourth is left open for Felicia. Often they speak of the chances of her having survived the adventure and the ways and means they might try to locate and rescue her.

On the surface, Arts' Haven appears to be a place of music, beauty, and art; it is in fact a haven of sorrow.

New Magic

Pick of propitiousness: This magical implement functions only when a skilled musician uses it to play a tune on a stringed instrument. During the first round of playing, the user must sing or chant the exact name of a particular foe. If the exact name is not known, the user must precisely identify the foe.

All characters within 50 feet of the user receive a +2 bonus to all attack rolls against the stated foe, even if the foe himself is not within 50 feet of the user. If the foe enters the area of effect, he suffers a −1 penalty to all attack rolls.

The *pick of propitiousness* can be used once a week for up to one hour. The user must concentrate on playing and must remain motionless while using the *pick*. The user can perform no other actions while playing, and loses concentration if he takes damage or is struck by a missile or melee attack. A *silence* spell also breaks the effect. Optionally, the DM™ might require a music proficiency check for every 10 minutes of playing; failure breaks the effect.

The user must have an unobstructed line of sight to the named foe, and must keep him in sight while playing.

XP Value: 1,500 **GP Value:** 7,500

Adventure Ideas

* The need to know the fate of Felicia growing so strong has caused the three owners of Arts' Haven to hire a band of adventurers.

The adventurers are charged with finding the woman—or discovering her fate.

* Brond learns of a magic harp rumored to lie in a monster's horde in the nearby mountains. He hires a group of adventurers to recover the instrument. ❑

The Living Galaxy

The "Weirdo SF Adventurers" Contest

by Roger E. Moore

A long, long time ago, in a POLYHEDRON® Newszine issue far, far away (issue #69, really), I started a contest in which the readers of this column were to think up the most bizarre player characters possible for science fiction role playing games—ones that would present interesting role playing opportunities along the lines of the starship player characters I suggested in POLYHEDRON Newszine issues #60-62. A number of readers rose to the challenge and sent in their responses, and I have collected those that struck me as the most interesting and remarkable. Entries did not have to be very detailed to win, but they did have to be kinky (unusual, fun, creative, and all that, yes—plus, there had to be a special game mechanic that distinguished that character from all others).

Science fiction role playing games have long had an odd assortment of player character types that make elves and dwarves look positively common. One of my favorites was the amoeboid, pun-loving Dralasites from TSR's STAR FRONTIERS® game, which could alter at will the number of arms and legs they had. For its *Traveller* and *Mega-Traveller* games, GDW developed: the Hiver, a highly intelligent sort of six-limbed starfish; the Zhodani, telepathic humans whose interstellar society encourages honesty, lawfulness, and conformity (at the expense of any sort of slightly unlawful "fun") in their caste-bound society; and the vegetarian but dangerously paranoid "centaurs" known as the K'kree. I once wrote up dolphins as PCs for the *Traveller* game (the articles were published in GDW's *Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society* and were later elaborated upon by William W. Connors in Digest Group's *Traveller's Digest*). Perhaps the weirdest aliens were from Chaosium's defunct but wonderfully imaginative *Ringworld* game, based on the novel by Larry Niven. What could be stranger than an expedition of Bandersnatchi, Grogs, Kdatlyno, Outsiders, and Orcas (killer whales)? Even the hominids of this game universe are bizarre, including the aptly named Grass Giants, Vampires, and Ghouls.

Robots, androids, mutant squirrels, and cyborgs have appeared in the GAMMA WORLD® and other science fiction games, each presenting their own bizarre qualities. (Of course, once you think about it, super hero role playing games have had even stranger characters than these. Look through the various character indices for Mayfair's *DC Heroes* or TSR's MARVEL SUPER HEROES lines for details.)

Let's see what other role playing challenges our readers have devised.

Bigger Than A Breadbox

Nick Simmonds, of Westfield, IN, was one of the three winners in this contest. He presented three different character types for science fiction games, the first of which was having each player role play a planet(!). "In this case," Nick Simmonds wrote, "I'm playing off on the Gaia Hypothesis, that the Earth is really an organism and we are the bacteria." He suggests that planetary PCs would need some sort of telepathic powers to influence the minds of their inhabitants, or they should have at least one person with whom they communicate.

Living planets have actually appeared in role playing games before. The *DM's Guide to Immortals*, from the old D&D® game Immortals boxed set, has a description of living planets, called megaliths, on pages 42-43. Megaliths have intriguing life cycles and biological (biogeological?) processes; it turns out that druids are the only humans capable of interpreting what a megalith wants, they can't translate very well (did you ever think your druid character was actually communicating with the planet he or she lived on?). Though megaliths don't appear to be playable as characters except under very unusual circumstances (they have diameters of up to one million miles), the idea is a fascinating one; maybe if *all* the characters were planets . . . hmmm. Another game-based living planet is the murderoid, measuring 1-600 miles across, from the AD&D® game's SPELLJAMMER® campaign (in which several creatures, like the turtlelike gammaroid and spherical gonn, exceed 1,000' in size); none of these seem to be very playable, either, in their current forms.

A variation on the living-planet idea is that of having the biosphere of a planet be considered as a living organism (which is probably closer to the Gaia Hypothesis). Perhaps the biosphere has some sort of supernormal, ponderous intelligence, one that can manifest a physical form by paranormal powers or else communicate by telepathy with certain individuals (druids? psychics?). One player character could be a regular human, perhaps an unskilled one, who receives the biosphere's messages and acts on them. ("End the deforestation of the northern continent, then stop the pollution of air and sea at Redlake Island.") This sounds like it could turn into an overdone ecological statement, but consider that the biosphere, as an entity, probably cannot distinguish pollution having manmade sources from that having natural sources (Redlake Island, for instance, could be an active volcano). In a one-world campaign with a little science fantasy mixed with its science fact, this biosphere representative could be quite interesting.

A more solid example of "megafauna" can be taken from Stanislaw Lem's novel, *Solaris*, in which scientists attempt to communicate with an immense (and probably sentient) amoeba-like organism that covers an entire planet's surface. The novel's thesis implied that not only was communicating with such an organism extremely difficult, it might even be impossible. For gaming purposes, we could assume that a world-organism of this sort could create man-sized offshoots of itself that would wander among human society for a limited time before attempting to rejoin the main organism and essentially "report back" on what they have seen and learned. The role playing of such creatures would be entertaining, though the game master would have to work out their psychology and motives (I would guess they would be very task-driven and naive, eager to "go home" once their missions were accomplished).

Elsewhere, Philip José Farmer used a nonsentient, carnivorous world-organism as a setting in his World of

Tiers series, but it wouldn't be suitable as a character in game play. H. P. Lovecraft's monstrous godling Azathoth is essentially a star-sized creature, though it is also insane and destructive.

The idea that *stars* might be intelligent creatures has appeared in science fiction literature several times. I think the first mention was in Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker,* in which the stars were discovered to be at war with galactic civilization because of the astroengineering projects undertaken by futuristic cultures. Frank Herbert's novel *Whipping Star* addresses this issue as well (the stars are telepathic and communicate with only a few humans). Both novels are well worth reading in their own right, and the latter may have very interesting applications to an interstellar campaign. At the largest end of the scale, there are the godlike starbeasts and constellates of the SPELLJAMMER campaign, each larger than whole worlds (a constellate can span up to 100 million square miles, and starbeasts carry planets on their backs, if not whole solar systems at times). At the moment, I cannot see how an intelligent star or the like could be role played in any science fiction game currently on the market—but that shouldn't stop anyone from trying it. Any ideas?

In short, playing a planet as itself would be hard to do. The amount of power an enraged (or even a mildly interested) biosphere or planet could summon scarcely bears thinking about; read the description of the megalith in the D&D game for potent comments on its power even as a nonplayer character. Playing a representative of a living planet is possible, however. It does stretch one's views on what's allowable as a character, but this is science fiction and this exercise was meant to stretch our minds. Good stretch, Nick.

"Hi! I'm your laser!"

Nick Simmonds also suggested artificially intelligent weapons as characters, which could be either cyborgs (having human or smaller brains) or artificially intelligent. He added that these could be given powers just as magical artifacts are given powers in the AD&D game's *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide.* Readers who have played certain fantasy role playing games should be familiar with magical swords that were more intelligent than their owners (and the annoying problems that those weapons cause at times). Jim Ward once wrote several humorous "Monty Haul" stories for DRAGON® Magazine (see issues #16 and 28) in which a player named Freddie creates and plays intelligent swords carried by flesh golems, which the swords can control—to the annoyance of the other players!

Certain RPGA™ Network tournament modules have also featured intelligent weapons as characters, so using the idea in a science fiction game is possible. I did it in a CRIMSON CRYSTAL™ book that I wrote for TSR some years ago; in *Renegades of Luntar,* one of the two main characters is a ruby crystal in which highly advanced technology has implanted an intelligence that can communicate with anyone who touches it, as well as provide enhanced visual capabilities and laserlike weaponry for the user. Think of an intelligent weapon as being one step below a fully mobile robot, and you can see how easy (and limiting) it would be to design and play. This one looks very workable if carefully worked into a game campaign (maybe the weapon is a unique secret device that was stolen from its laboratory—or maybe it engineered its own escape!).

I do admit that when I think of intelligent weapons, I start to laugh because I think of the planet-busting bomb from the movie *Dark Star.* See the film if at all possible to understand what I'm talking about.

Many Minds At Once

Finally, Nick Simmonds suggested having characters with multiple heads, brains, or personalities. Each intelligence would be role played by a different player, perhaps with one mind dominating the others or the actions of the body (the personalities could also vote on control of the body). I had an idea like that when I wanted to role play an ettin in an AD&D game, and similar multiple-personality ideas have appeared in science fiction for years (see Frank Herbert's *The Dosadi Experiment,* Robert Heinlein's *I Will Fear No Evil,* or Hal Clement's *Needle*). There are real cases of multiple-personality disorders known today, and playing the separate personalities of a "multiple" would be highly interesting. The spiderlike araneas, created by Bruce Heard in his D&D® game column "The Voyage of the *Princess Ark*" (DRAGON Magazine issue #183) are essentially multiples, though they magically change their shapes as well as their personalities when they "switch." At least one super hero in the MARVEL UNIVERSE and MARVEL SUPER HEROES game, Aurora, is a multiple. Note that multiple personalities in real life are created by severe child abuse and other trauma—not much fun to contemplate, but valid as a character background in a game (perhaps it happened during wartime or in an institution). Check the psychology section of your local bookstore or library for more information (see in particular books like *Sybil* or *I Am Eve*).

Installing a multiple personality in a character by technological means is possible in science fiction game scenarios, perhaps being done to special agents on dangerous missions in which they must assume new identities. A variation on this would be the personality overlay, in which a technologically created personality suppresses the normal one on a permanent basis (as apparently happens in the movie *Total Recall*—see it!). A new player would role play the character every time a new personality is given to it, though occasional "breakouts" of other personalities might occur under stressful situations. Personality overlays are used in the old *Traveller* adventure *Expedition to Zhodane* as a means of outwitting the mind-reading Zhodani. This is a very interesting option.

Sentient Bacteria?

Douglas Burck, of Boyd, KY, came up with the idea of having microbe PCs that were intelligent either individually or collectively (humans could be considered to have the collective consciousness of the many cells making up our bodies, but here we're assuming the cells themselves are smart and have telepathic powers, too). At worse, Douglas notes, such microbes could attempt to infect other beings and take them over (sort of like the alien monstrosity from John Carpenter's movie, *The Thing*). I was reminded of James Blish's short story, "Surface Tension," in which miniaturized humans must fight marauding microscopic foes, and Isaac Asimov's *Fantastic Voyage,* in which miniaturized humans in someone's bloodstream fight antibodies and white blood cells that regard the humans as infections). If the setting is not itself miniaturized, role playing a smart bacterium would be difficult: Where would it be kept? How would it communicate? What could it do? The idea does have "kinky" appeal,

however. Douglas suggests FASA's *Star Trek: The RPG* or West End Games' *Star Wars: The RPG* for this character type, probably because these games have a wide range of aliens. I'd suggest at least that such a being have sentient cells that inhabit only one body at the start of the game, with some possibility for temporary infection (and control) of other bodies.

Collective Consciousness

Douglas Burck also suggested the player's character could have one mind but several distinct bodies. These bodies might be able to merge into a whole, like the small oddball aliens in *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey,* but this isn't required. The connection between the bodies could be by telepathy, cybernetics, or even pheromones, but permanent physical contact is not normally done. I thought about an intelligent organism with smart parasites, like a huge fish with remoras or lampreys stuck to it; perhaps only the parasites are the smart ones!

"As an NPC," Douglas writes, "the being could be a nation or planet. If the collective consciousness is used in a first-contact scenario, it could react to the PCs as if they were an invading disease or try to absorb them." This reflects some earlier ideas on sentient bacteria and living planets, as you can see. He prefers using this idea with Steve Jackson Game's *GURPS* rules or TSR's STAR FRONTIERS® game.

Olaf Stapledon seems to have created the concept of a collective intelligence in his books *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker,* and these works are strongly recommended for the details they offer on such creatures and their life styles. Hive minds, usually in insect form, appear in many places in fiction and gaming. Role playing a large group of small creatures that interact to perform intelligent actions is certainly a challenge; if a few creatures are lost, the mind carries on, though it would become more "stupid" as it lost more of its bodies. As long as its bodies can reproduce quickly, such an intelligence would be quite long-lived, able to pass through tiny spaces fluidly and evade damage from projectile weapons that pass entirely through its "body" (the swarm of creatures that make it up). It would probably prefer to fly or swim rather than crawl, but anything might be possible. An animated episode of *Star Trek* featured a "colony creature" of this type that had seemed humanoid but could disconnect its various body parts and float them off in pieces to accomplish its tasks.

Terrible Terraformer

Also in Douglas Burck's letter is the terraformer, made for TSR's STAR FRONTIERS game or any other one having "slow FTL" drives, though he based this idea on episodes of *Star Trek* and *Space: 1999.* A terraformer is a powerful character with an overriding mission to rebuild a "lost" civilization (or just a part of it, like the item's builders) on a new planet, using any resources available. This would not make a good PC, he writes, unless the terraformer was fairly diplomatic. The terraformer, in solid (robotic?) or ghostly form, will seek to acquire all items it needs to restart its parent culture. One of the adventures in Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Space Adventures* concerns an entity of this sort (see "Rebirth").

Fish Out Of Water

Reader Tim Emrick, of Whitestown, IN, suggested a character that "must overcome an environmental obstacle, such as being a water-breather in an oxygen atmosphere. Humanoids could use space-suits filled with water (or whatever liquid the PC is native to) instead of air, with appropriate modifications to filtration systems and the like. Some creatures will not be so well suited to carrying around their environment and will need something that amounts to a self-propelled fish tank: an environmental transport module (ETM) mounted on wheels, treads, or an antigravity device, as appropriate to its technology level. The ETM would have systems built in to allow the creature inside to direct its motion, communicate with others, and possibly manipulate tools with robotic arms. The creatures in the Navigators' Guild in Frank Herbert's *Dune* series required special machines to leave their ships and interact with humans (the movie *Dune* dramatizes such a scene quite effectively)."

Tim goes on to point out that the idea can encompass any PC with limited mobility, such as an invalid or naturally limbless being. The concept eventually crosses over with that of using cyborg characters who are little more than brains connected to highly developed cybernetic bodies. The more advanced the robotic bodies, the more potential power such a character will have, so GMs should use caution in this area even though it is one of the more playable ideas. Role playing a merman is certainly going to be easier than role playing a dolphin or killer whale!

On-line Antics

Our honorable mention "weirdo SF adventurer" comes from R. C. Wauls, of Willow Grove, PA, who suggested PCs who were entirely part of the Net, the virtual-reality computer "world" common to cyberpunk literature and related RPGs such as R. Talsorian's *Cyberpunk,* ICE's *Cyberspace,* and FASA's *Shadowrun* games. The character would have no physical body at all, being purely an electronic creation that aids the other party members through computer terminals and the like. The entire party could even be part of the Net in some adventures. William Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive* was suggested as a resource for detailing such a character.

This idea isn't far from the self-aware computer, though a Net character could move freely from computer to computer, perhaps being a part of them all in some way. Actually, one recent science fiction game *has* incorporated Net characters: TSR's BUCK ROGERS® XXVc™ game. These PCs are called Digital Personalities and are generated using a system derived from AD&D game mechanics. Interested gamers should consult the boxed XXVc set's rules for details on how these characters live—and die.

Sanity At Last!

My thanks to all others who entered the contest, especially to Noah Raford of Conifer, CO, for his "living combat snowblower" for GDW's *2300 AD* game (cute), and to Dwight Scott Miller for his detailed character Yul Huttha Thwee.

For more thoughts on bizarre PCs, see the editorial in DRAGON issue #180, "The centaur of attention," in which different ways of making a PC unique are discussed by playing with their game mechanics. You can get some very strange aliens out of reading through the character types in Mayfair's *Cosmic Encounters* game or even the bestiary lists for any fantasy game—ever play a doppleganger-like character based on the AD&D game monster? Let your imagination go free and see what remarkable characters you can devise for your own living galaxy. ❑

The Everwinking Eye

A Visit To Melvaunt

by Ed Greenwood

"Thentia? Melvaunt? Ye want to see frontier sword-work? Dead men lying in the streets, orcs everywhere, and every man and maid with blades raised against ye on general suspicion? Enjoy thy trip!"

Krommas Zangalor, Master Merchant of Hlintar, said to a young merchant in *The Fall of Coins* tavern
Year of Leaping Flame

Our tour of the Moonsea has taken us to Melvaunt and Thentia. These two smoke-shrouded, fortified cities look very similar—and neither is beautiful. They have cobbled streets, mud-and pitch-sealed stone buildings, slate roofs, and no greenery anywhere within their walls. The roar and stink of smelters and the ringing clangor of forges governs each city night and day. Thentians and Melvauntians are legendary for their ability to sleep through a pitched battle or any other cacophony.

In both cities, metal implements and weapons are plentiful. Talented smiths are more numerous in Thentia and Melvaunt than in any other human cities of comparable (small) size. Almost all such craftworkers are human; gnomes and dwarves are rarer than one might expect around the Moonsea. This is despite the fact that gnomes had delves beneath the Border Forest long ago, and the dwarves of the Iron House dwelt in the rich mines of Tethyamar near the headwaters of the Tesh as recently as 40 winters ago.

The dwarves and gnomes have either been lured away by the promise of an easier life and more wealth in the kingdoms around the Inner Sea, or they have been enslaved—and killed through overwork—by the Zhentarim. Only one dwarven smith of note was known around the Moonsea's shores; resident in Hillsfar until the coming to power of Maalthiir (when he vanished).

Inside Melvaunt

Melvaunt is home to around 40 thousand permanent residents, and serves as a base for another 10 thousand traveling merchants, sea-captains, and miners. Three old, often feuding families hold power over the city: the Leiyraghons, the Nanthers, and the Bruils.

Melvaunt is governed by a self-perpetuating council of lords. New members are added to fill vacancies as they arise. Additional seats can be added by paying two million gold pieces to the council. The council cannot veto such purchases. Surprisingly, six such seats have been added to the Council in the past 30 winters. Once a new seat is established, it is permanent.

Candidates who are considered for a vacant seat are always prominent merchants of the city. To win a seat, they must exhibit "demonstrated loyalty" to Melvaunt, which means three things: they must not be known to have caused the death of any lord of Melvaunt; must not be known to have sold arms to, or be engaged in any military alliance or compact with the enemies of Melvaunt (Zhentil Keep and Mulmaster); and must show their support for Melvaunt's council by making it a gift of coinage or trade bars of not less than 100,000 gp.

The present Council is 39 strong. Eight Lords are Leiyraghons, seven are Nanthers, six are Bruils, and the other 18 are from minor families.

The Lord Chancellor is the old, bearded, warily wise (NG hm F8) Ghunduilith Leiyraghon. He is chairman and treasurer of the council and has the right to speak last among the lords.

The Lord Envoy is Dundeld Nanther (LN hm F6). He is the council's diplomat and first speaker. He daily grows more old and frail for his tasks and is expected to soon resign from the office.

The Lord of the Keys is the sadistic, monstrously large (NE hm F11, ST 18/32) Halmuth Bruil. He is general of Melvaunt's soldiery and is responsible for policing the city streets and defending the area.

Melvaunt's Lord of the Waves is the white-haired but young wizard Meldonder Nuiran (LN hm W11). He is admiral of the city's small navy and inspector of all ships entering Melvaunt's harbor.

These Lords hold the real power over the daily operations of the city; all the lords are busy merchants interested in their personal careers and wealth, and they meet only once a month to deal with city business. Moreover, in times of peace, most lords only attend about one in three Council meetings. The vote of an absent lord may not be cast by proxy, and a vote of the majority of the lords is required for the enacting of any important decree or law. If not enough lords are present, the council sends messengers to summon the absentees, or—if time does not press—the business is put off until the next meeting.

The council rules and taxes lightly, and is popular with most Melvauntians, despite the fact the three wealthy families dominate it, and despite its often bitter intrigues.

Every transaction in Melvaunt, no matter how large or small in value or number of items exchanged, is subject to a "trade tax" of 1 copper piece, collected by the selling merchant and paid nightly to the Treasury Hall.

Every wagon, sledge, or other conveyance, or laden pack animal is subject to a "gate tax" of 1 copper piece, payable immediately upon passage through any of the city's three gates.

The penalty for theft of any tax money by a guardsman is the loss of one hand. The penalty for theft of any tax money by a citizen is loss of all goods and expulsion from the city. Upon a second offense, or if the money cannot be recovered and the citizen's goods are not of sufficient value to cover the loss, the penalty is death or sale into slavery. Several of the southern lands have emissaries in the city who buy such slaves from the Council. People an emissary refuses to buy as slaves because they are too weak, sick (especially if carrying a contagious disease), old, or injured, will be slain.

Ships entering Melvaunt harbor are subject to a "dock tax" of 1 gp per entry. This allows a ship dockside space, temporary warehouse space if needed, and freedom from "sick wait" (quarantine), which the city orders if the tax is not immediately paid to the inspection party that boards each ship at the mouth of Melvaunt's harbor.

Ships are boarded regardless of the time of day, the season, or the weather in which they arrive. Boarding parties are known to be equipped with magical fire-producing weapons with which they can quickly set a ship afire if they are defied or attacked.

Ships wintering in Melvaunt harbor after the ice closes in, even if in drydock for repairs, must pay a 5 gp "wintering tax." Ships of Melvaunt's navy are exempt from the taxes.

Melvaunt levies no other taxes, but it has done well over the years through its confiscations of the goods, wealth, and properties of those who are expelled from the city, executed, declared dead, or declared traitors to Melvaunt while absent from the city (all of these sentences can be imposed only after a majority vote of the council).

Death may be declared in the absence of a body by vote of the council. Such a declaration can be passed only if at least three-quarters of the currently-titled Lords vote in its favor (i.e. not merely three-quarters of those attending a given meeting). The issue can only be brought before the Council upon representation by the city's Abandoned Properties Rollkeeper—a civil servant who gathers and summarizes the reports of the street soldiery, and briefs the Lord of the Keys and the council.

Several prominent Melvauntian merchants rarely visit their home city, preferring to operate in warmer climes (such as Amn) or larger centers of commerce (such as Waterdeep).

The Military

Melvaunt maintains a standing army of five thousand. The army patrols the city's approaches for a day's ride from the walls, guards its gates and public buildings, provides bodyguards for lords and civil servants, and polices the city.

Twice in the past Melvaunt has hired mercenaries by the thousands in Hillsfar and rushed them by ship to the city within five days, an astonishing feat that has made Zhentil Keep wary of its neighbor. A Zhentilar army once thought to storm unprotected Melvaunt after Lord Rather, then Lord Chancellor of Melvaunt, declared the troops of Zhentil Keep no longer welcome on Melvauntian soil, and Melvaunt's ships no longer at Zhentil Keep's disposal.

The Zhentilar knew most of Melvaunt's troops were far from Melvaunt, marching home from The Citadel of the Raven. The Zhentilar hurried to get to the city themselves, and were barely a day away from its walls when Melvauntian ships landed hastily-hired mercenaries behind and in front of them one evening. The mercenaries attacked the encamped Zhentilar force by night, routed it, and by morning were signalling the ships to pick them up for the run back to Hillsfar.

Melvaunt's navy currently consists of a dozen ships—two small, fast "coastboats"; one old, large, and heavy warship; two middle-aged, small "cruisers"; and seven newly-built, fast "ravens."

The keels of another four ravens have been laid in Melvaunt's dockyards, and when they are done another four are planned (whereupon the old cruisers will be sold, probably for use as metal-freighters on the Inner Sea).

Melvaunt's naval ships have fought as far south as the Pirate Isles and as far west as the Neck, but they rarely venture south of where the Lis empties into the Dragon Reach.

Society and Religion

In the center of Melvaunt is a large open market. Only in the summer months are there actually vendors' stalls in the market; in the colder months, this area serves as a horse-trading and paddock area, an assembly ground for caravans, and a packing and loading area for goods of all sorts. A company of 16 guardsmen patrol the market day and night.

The spot is famous as the site of the sorcerous duel, some 20 winters back, between Jardeth Miir and Culrimmon Meirklam—a battle that ended in the self-transformation of Jardeth into a boar. Meirklam promptly sliced the boar into bits with a spell of whirling blades, fried it in a blaze of conjured fire, and served it hot to spectators by *telekinesis*. Meirklam later ventured into Thar in search of lost magic and for a place to build a tower in solitude, and has not been heard from since.

The city's most prominent mage these days is probably Ulmm Jhaszure, a CN hm W11, whose specialty is the magical control of servitor creatures.

Melvaunt has small temples and shrines to most human deities of Faerun. Bane is still worshipped despite rumors of his destruction during The Time of Troubles. There are also several major temples. These are dedicated to Gond, Lliira, and Loviatar.

A note on Inner Sea temple terminology: A temple complex is known as a "sanctul" (plural: "sanctar") a shrine may be called a shrine or an "orbest"; and a holy site or place of power or sanctity that has been left untouched for pilgrims to visit and worship in the open is a "maerl."

In Melvaunt, The Purple Portals is consecrated to Gond. It has eight priests and 26 blessed followers. Under High Priest Hlessen Muragh (N hm P12), the temple staff searches out, collects, and constantly tinkers with new ideas and inventions. They recently devised improvements in the making of parchment; the manufacture of fine waxed thread; the waterproofing of winter furs by painting the insides with a mixture of nut oil and clay, and baking oils onto the furs so they shed moisture and do not become soaked and intolerably heavy in wet weather; and the making of an improved variety of "hardsand," known to us as cement.

The Purple Portals trades its secrets for gold and specializes in solving mercantile problems by devising new processes and packaging methods. The temple's influence is broad in the North, and it is well thought of by the general public.

The Hall of Laughter was recently established by Sshandar Lyrindtar, who left The House of Happiness in Hillsfar (upon reaching 9th level) to found a stronghold dedicated to Lliira on the north side of the Moonsea—the first worshipping-place for the Goddess in the Moonsea North.

Sshandar does not style herself "Mistress of the Revels" (the traditional title for High Priests of Lliira is "Master of the Revels") because that title is properly Lliira's own. Instead, she prefers the title "Laughing Lady." She is formally known as "Lady Joyworker"; this also is one of Lliira's own titles, but Sshandar doesn't have much control over what Melvauntians call her.

Sshandar (a CG hf P9) is good-humored and is a fine singer. She has rich red hair, a beauteous visage, and stands more than six feet tall. The revels in her Hall are attended by far more than devout supplicants of Lliira, and she is generally well-liked in Melvaunt. Noble families rarely attend Revels of Joy, because they can afford to hold their own parties and restrict those who attend to folk of their own choosing. Such feasts are usually dedicated to Sharess (see page 17 of the *Cyclopedia of the Realms* booklet, in the original boxed Realms Campaign Set).

Our time and space have almost run out. Elminster assures me that we'll finish Melvaunt next time—starting with its last major temple, to Loviatar—and go on to look at Thentia. Until then: swords high!

❑

star of the excruciatingly bad "Gor" films—as the main good guy. In quite a few instances, I found myself rooting for the demons.

Demons 2

1987, 88 Minutes
Imperial Entertainment
Director: Lamberto Bava
Cast: David Knight, Bobby Rhodes, Asia Argento
**

Largely a rip-off of other horror films—most notably David Cronenberg's *They Came From Within*—*Demons 2* sort of picks up where the first film left off. Tenants in a fortresslike upscale apartment tower (called, creatively enough, the Tower) become the victims of the demon plague this time. An annoying woman sneaks away from her birthday party to watch a "documentary" about four adventurers exploring the demon-filled area cordoned off after the last film. When one of the demons gets out of the television, the birthday-girl becomes the first to transform, complete with those familiar slow-motion shots of teeth falling out.

Like the first flick, *Demons 2* suffers from unbelievably shoddy plotting and vast areas of unexplained story. The characters are all types—the little boy left alone for the night, the typical family, the woman with the pet dog, and so on. Still, the acting is a little better this time around. We almost care about a few of the characters, which makes the repetitive shots of acidic demon blood burning through ceilings a little more tolerable.

Demons 2 suffers most in terms of originality. Not only does Bava swipe quite a bit of the premise from *They Came From Within*, whole sequences are ripped off from other horror flicks. The most noticeable involves a woman trapped in her apartment, running from a demon that is momentarily outside a host body. The set-up and most of the shots are derived wholesale from the much superior Zuni doll story in *Trilogy of Terror*, right down to the demon's saw-like teeth and gaping maw.

There's a third "Demons" film, called—wait for it—*Demons 3*, but it thankfully has nothing to do with the film-within-a-film premise of this column. From all I've read about it, even people who love Bava's work think it's terrible.

Videodrome

1983, 87 Minutes
Universal/MCA
Director: David Cronenberg
Cast: James Woods, Deborah Harry
****

David Cronenberg has made some of the most unrelentingly depressing SF films of all time. His stories are packed with thematic discussions of the perverse nature of human sexuality—as in *They Came From Within* and *The Brood*—and the dehumanization brought about by modern technology—as in that cheerful epic, *The Fly*. His films are always interesting, always challenging, but it is never a good idea to watch one unless you've steeled yourself for it.

Such is the case with *Videodrome*. Cable television lowlife Max Renn (James Woods) runs the sleazy Civic TV, which specializes in softcore porn and hardcore violence. When he sees his first tape of "Videodrome," he's hooked. The underground show features no characters, no storyline, just unrelenting, realistic torture—sort of like the average Dolph Lundgren flick.

The problem with "Videodrome" is the signal creates a brain tumor that takes control of your perception of reality. And when Max tries to discover the tapes' source, he comes up against a massive conspiracy. Is "Videodrome" some secret right-wing government plot to weed out the "undesirables" who watch Civic TV? Is it the creation of Dr. Brian O'Blivion, whose Cathode Ray Mission preaches television as the savior of the disenfranchised (the only way to "patch them back into the mixing board" of reality)?

In the end, we're never quite certain. As the story progresses, the narrative is preempted more and more frequently by Max's hallucinations, folding more and more tightly in on itself until the final disturbing sequences. These nightmarish visions—at least we assume they're visions—are filled with familiar Cronenberg imagery: a gun fuses to Max's hand, making him a strange hybrid of man and machine; television sets pulse and moan like overexcited lovers; hands are transformed into bloody grenades that explode, blowing people to bits.

In the course of the film, someone warns Max away from "Videodrome" because, unlike the standard sex-and-violence shows he favors, it has a philosophy. The same can be said of the Cronenberg film; the violence and gore in *Videodrome* is much more disturbing than the body parts littering a typical "Friday the 13th" entry because of the serious philosophy behind it. If, as the movie proposes, television or film enters our mind and, once there, cannot be distinguished from the rest of reality, in viewing this film we are watching truly horrible things that can effect us the same way the Videodrome signal effects Max Renn. A chilling thought indeed.

The Video Dead

1987, 90 Minutes
Manson International
Director: Robert Scott
Cast: Roxanna Augesen, Rocky Duvall, Sam David McClelland
*

This mostly inept direct-to-video wonder makes the "Demons" series look like *Citizen Kane*. The Hi-Lite delivery company mistakenly drops off a television to a grumpy writer instead of to the Institute for the Study of the Occult. The TV only shows one thing, an old black & white horror flick, *Zombie Blood Nightmare*. Of course, the idiot writer doesn't think this is unusual, just as he dismisses the fact that the television keeps turning itself on—even when it's unplugged. Needless to say, the zombies escape from their Japanese-made prison and the writer is soon zombie chow.

The story really gets limping along when a brother and sister move into the writer's now-abandoned house and discover the television in the attic. Here the plot gets a bit confused, as the TV tries to seduce the guy by manifesting a woman in his room one night. Some monster-hunter called "The Garbage Man" kills the ghostly woman when she goes back into the TV, then we never hear from either of them again. Anyway, the aimless subplot fills time until the real zombie fighting starts, when a redneck from Texas who once owned the TV shows up to help the kids take on the shuffling undead.

Apart from a few twists in the treatment of the zombies (centered around the fact that they think they're alive, so you can sometimes trick them into leaving you alone), *The Video Dead* stumbles along well-worn trails. There's nothing frightening about the story, especially since director-writer-producer Scott insists on spending endless amounts of film shooting the zombies' dirty shoes as they shuffle along. ❑

Feats Of Valor

How To Be A Hero And Survive

by Todd Reynoldson

Ah, the hero, that person who risks life and limb for others, one of the oldest player character personalities that exists. How many of us have played the noble fighter who joins in with the underdogs to save the day, or the kindly wizard who seeks out injustice and rights wrongs done to those who cannot help themselves? Or perhaps it was a cleric racing to the rescue of some wounded comrade, or putting himself between the terrible vampire and the rest of the party. Then again, it could have been the paladin, who fought three ogres so the rest of the party could free the prisoners.

What a hero!

But how long do these paragons of valor survive? I would guess that the true hero is very uncommon in AD&D® game campaigns. Many characters have done something heroic—once. But most PCs are cautious, if not cowardly. And what is the reason there is not more heroes? Because it's bloody dangerous!

Here are a few things for players and DM™s to think about when a PC is in a heroic mood.

Character class is not a consideration, as heroism can come from anybody.

Alignment, however, is a factor, and probably anyone who isn't on the good side of Neutral should find another persona.

The most troublesome deed for a hero is just staying alive.

If you opt to play a champion of good, begin by telling the DM that you are planning to play your character as the heroic type. What you are hoping for in return is greater experience points for heroic acts and more respect and friendship from NPCs. Perhaps the DM also will smile upon your character and occasionally adjust the circumstances to give your hero a break.

Battle tactics are really up to each individual player, but here are few ideas:

Charge! Yes charge. It works, although how well it works varies from campaign to campaign. I have found as a DM and a player that charging cannot only rattle the opposition, but raises morale among your allies. Note that it is unwise to charge opponents who have weapons that can be set against a charge—spears and pole arms for instance. It's not worth it. (But who said heroes were wise?)

Now what if you can't charge? What if you're surprised?

You could use the Han Solo bluff, charging anyway; but this is only for higher level heroes. Lower level heroes must be a little more cautious. I would propose a very fast tactical withdrawal to the next bend of the cave or passageway, or better yet a room with a solid door. There you may have a round or two to ready yourself to bushwhack your pursuers.

Note that any reader who does not realize that charging is primarily for fighters will find that their wizards will survive only one battle, unless the other players enjoy your antics so much they come to your aid.

Dress the part: Wardrobe is something few players think through fully. I'm not talking about taking warm clothes if you are traveling in cold climates or wearing special boots when rock climbing. This is much more important than comfort. I'm talking about style, fabric texture, color—the kind of clothes that catch the eye. Here are some suggestions for fighters and wizards, though most of the ideas can be used for other character classes, too.

Fighters don't have many options here. I mean, they are usually covered head to foot in armor. So all I can advise is to get out your cleaning rag and polish that armor until it gleams with awe-inspiring light. Have a little scroll work done on it as well and some emblem placed on the shield, such as a lion, dragon, etc.

Let us now get to the accessories. The sword: choose a big one, preferably a two-handed one that can carve the opposition in half. If a huge sword is not available or is impractical (perhaps your comrades have hinted that your wild swings have given them more close shaves than they need, especially when they all had beards before you joined them), I would try a bastard sword. Your character also can use this as a long sword in a pinch. If you wish to have your character use another sort of weapon, make sure it is big, looks deadly, and is deadly.

Of course, a magical weapon is always better than a non-magical one. The type your character should be looking for is one that does something spectacular when it is drawn—bursts into flame, creates brilliant light, howls with rage, etc. Your character wants something that will impress the natives.

For wizards, spend some money on your appearance, but be practical; it can be very hard to run in a great, long, flowing, heavy robe that trails three feet behind you. On the other hand, if your character is a powerful wizard who uses *fireballs* to start the barbecue, then he or she won't be doing much running.

Your wizard must have the basics: people expect a robe. It should be decorated with various arcane symbols. I think it looks pretty good if your wizard's robe is trimmed in gold or silver.

Hats are great; they give a character height, and lend some prominence. "Look at me, I'm a wizard wearing a hat, come near me and Ill fry you!"

Skullcaps offer an air of understated power: "So you're a Death Knight, who cares?"

Another item a wizard must have is a staff. It doesn't have to be magical—any old, slightly warped piece of wood will do. However, you should make sure it has some little emblem on the top: a dragon's claw, or a perhaps a crystal. It also doesn't hurt to pack a few fake wands which have had *Nystul's magic aura* spells cast on them.

Here's a few other tips. Young wizards should grow beards. A beard is certain to make your character appear older and more mature. Try this: have your character get a few pouches of powdered crystal or glitter and sprinkle it over his hair, beard, clothes, and any equipment visible. The upshot of this little exercise is that whenever the character moves his whole body will sparkle. Anyone who sees that will think your character is so charged with magic his or her every movement lets a little magic spill out.

Animals: An armored mount can make a big impression. Any motley group of brigands is going to think twice about fighting when your character, mounted on a white charger whose hooves pound the earth like thunder, comes charging. A dog of some kind is also a good companion. It does not necessarily have to be a war hound, though that wouldn't hurt. Some kind of animal companion is good for your character's reputation. It will make the hero recognizable. "Look, it must be Zendry. See, even the tales about the great eagle are true. It sits upon his shoulder, always ever watchful!"

Get a reputation: Your hero's great deeds aren't worth much until word about them gets around; one of the few advantages of being a well-known hero is that you can use your reputation to dishearten intelligent opponents. But who knows about your character's great sword arm or powerful magic? Sure, those two dozen orcs, eight trolls, and six evil cloud giants do. Though the way your character left them, they are in no condition to spread tales.

Unless there is a bard in your hero's party or your character has done some great service to a whole country, word of your character's prowess isn't going to spread. So, try to bring your victims back alive. There's nothing like personally delivering an assassin to the court room, or showing off the ferociousness of a troll. This can be very dangerous for lower-level heroes, so let's see what else you can do.

One good way of spreading the word about heroic deeds is find some town with a reasonably large population, and then find something to kill nearby, preferably something that has been harassing the town.

When your hero has slain this local menace, go to the busiest tavern in town (make sure you do not wash first), stride boldly in, take out the head (or a claw) of the vanquished beast, and throw it in the center of the room. This has quite an effect if your character does it while still clad in blood-

splattered garb and still caked with the sweat and dirt of battle. The character should remain silent for a while, then slowly turn his head, starring at all the patrons.

After that, the hero should walk to the bar and order a large drink (milk is not the beverage of choice in this case). Sooner or later someone will ask about the creature whose head sits in the middle of the establishment. Now is the time tell your hero's tale. Don't forget to mention the character's name—often. One more thing, it is also good manners to give a few coins to the servants who have to clean up the mess from the trophy.

Bring along friends: It is a sad fact that even a hero has limits. There are going to be times when your hero shall need assistance from his fellow adventures.

Yes! Those brave souls who have boldly walked behind your character for many years or perhaps days can be necessary. Unfortunately, these folks probably have a slight aversion to large, hairy, slime-covered monsters with two-foot long teeth and razor sharp claws—not to mention the odd vampire, orcish army, or clan of giants.

I know they're not much to work with, but they're all your hero has got. These stalwart companions might be a little reluctant to help, and a hero of course cannot use physical persuasion to get them to come along. It is against the "rules." Your hero has to use more subtle persuasion, which is just as effective, maybe even more so.

Here are a few tricks (persuasive arguments) to get your hero's over-cautious comrades to help:

1. Collect favors. Your character most likely has helped at least one person in the party. Drop a subtle hint that the target has a debt to pay.
2. Mention that the task at hand just might make them rich and famous.
3. Suggest that the proposed venture will be easy if everyone works together, and point out that most of the PCs only need a few hundred more experience points to go up a level.
4. Speculate that the upcoming encounter could be a major piece of "the puzzle." (That is, the encounter could have a far-reaching effect on the campaign.)
5. Suggest that the bad guys could have important information the party is seeking.
6. Wonder out loud if all the other PCs are craven cowards.
7. Point out that your character is carrying an item of great power or value, and the party can't allow someone else to get it, so they must follow along to keep the item from being lost.
8. Remark, "Charge now! And we shall triumph with ease!"
9. Say "Hey, it worked last time, didn't it?"
10. Say, "Hey, it will work this time, I'm sure!"
11. Announce, "I know this monster. If we charge together, making a big show, it will flee in panic."
12. Cast an *audible glammer* spell behind the party, then suggest that it would be better to advance and face the known enemy in front than the unknown horror that is behind.

So get out there! Rescue that princess, save that village, destroy that bogeyman single handedly. And the next time you come to any grand city and the guard at the gate sluggishly looks up asks, "Who are you?" Look him square in the eye and say it: "I'm a HERO!" ❑

Solution To Cutting Remarks (Issue #77)

B	A	M	F	■	D	I	R	E	■	P	R	E	■	D	D	T	■	M	A	S
E	L	O	I	■	A	F	A	R	■	R	U	N	■	R	A	H	■	A	R	C
Y	O	U	R	A	O	R	T	A	■	T	N	T	■	E	Y	E	■	N	B	A
S	T	E	E	L	■	I	S	S	E	V	E	R	E	D	■	F	S	T	O	P
■	■	■	B	L	O	T	■	E	V	E	■	A	N	D	Y	O	U	A	R	E
A	F	R	A	I	D	■	■	■	A	T	A	N	Y	■	E	R	E	■	■	■
Q	U	I	T	E	D	E	A	D	R	E	S	T	A	S	S	U	R	E	D	■
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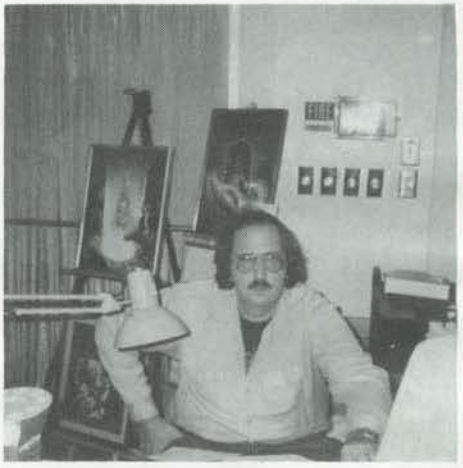
A	Y	E	■	A	L	T	O	S	■	■	■	■	T	H	O	R	■	O	L	A	F
■	■	■	F	L	I	N	D	■	H	Y	D	R	A	■	■	P	R	I	N	T
■	G	R	I	E	V	O	U	S	I	N	J	U	R	Y	T	A	B	L	E	■
A	L	A	N	S	■	■	L	A	M	A	S	■	G	O	O	N	S	■	■	■
R	O	D	S	■	D	U	E	L	■	■	■	■	N	I	K	E	S	■	C	R	O
T	R	I	■	P	C	S	■	■	H	U	M	A	N	E	■	■	B	E	E	R
■	Y	O	U	R	C	O	M	P	A	N	I	O	N	S	W	I	L	L	D	O
■	■	■	Z	O	A	■	E	I	G	H	T	■	■	■	A	N	A	L	O	G
T	H	E	I	R	B	E	S	T	■	A	E	R	■	S	Y	L	S	■	■	■
B	A	L	S	A	■	T	O	C	O	N	S	O	L	E	■	A	T	O	N	E
I	R	V	■	T	O	T	■	H	I	D	■	Y	O	U	R	W	I	D	O	W
R	U	E	■	E	L	I	■	E	L	M	■	A	L	S	O	■	N	I	N	E
D	M	S	■	D	E	N	■	D	Y	E	■	L	A	S	T	■	G	E	A	S

Variety was the order of the day at Coscon, October 9-11, Beaver Falls, PA



BLOODMOOSE™
AND COMPANY

by Gary M. Williams © 1991

OH GOODNESS ME! THIS JUST ISN'T WORKING OUT, BLOODMOOSE!! WE'VE GOT TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO RAISE THAT 150 MILLION ZELGRIBS!
FOR HIRE NO JOB
WELL, WE COULD ALWAYS TRY IT LIKE WE DO BACK HOME.
OH? AND HOW'S THAT?
FOR HIRE NO JOBS TO SMALL!
HANG 'ROUND INN A LOCAL TAVERN! SOMBODY MIGHT HIRE US OUT AS ADVENTURERS!
DOESN'T THAT INVOLVE ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES?
SOMETIMES, BUT THAT'S WHERE TH' BIG MONEY IS!!
BIG MONEY? WONDERFUL! WE'LL START WITH THE ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES FIRST!
OH MY...THIS IS CERTAINLY A COLOURFUL ESTABLISHMENT. NOW WHAT?
AW, JES' HANG 'ROUND 'N' HOPE SOMEBODY OFFERS US UH GOOD JOB.
YA GOTTA BE COOL 'BOUT IT! SUM O' THESE FOLKS MAY NOT BE ON TH' UP 'N' UP...
WELL! WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR SUCH NONSENSE!
EXCUSE ME MY GOOD FELLOW, BUT MY FRIEND HERE AND I ARE DESPERATE! DO YOU BY ANY CHANCE REQUIRE OUR SERVICES?
..UH... DOC...
WHUT TH'....?
WE COVER ALL KINDS OF SERVICES... WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE LAW... BUT... UH....
THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT WE'D NOT DO ANYTHING ILLEGAL, HEH, HEH, UNLESS THE MONEY WAS RIGHT... GET ME?
WINK!
NUDGE NUDGE
HEY! WHADDA TAKE ME FOR ANYWAY?!?
HOLD IT RITE THAR YA BIG...
HELP! POLICE! BOUNCER! FIGHT! FIGHT!
HEY! I HEARS TAPPIN'....
IGNORE IT!
GIN.
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